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THE NEW YORKER

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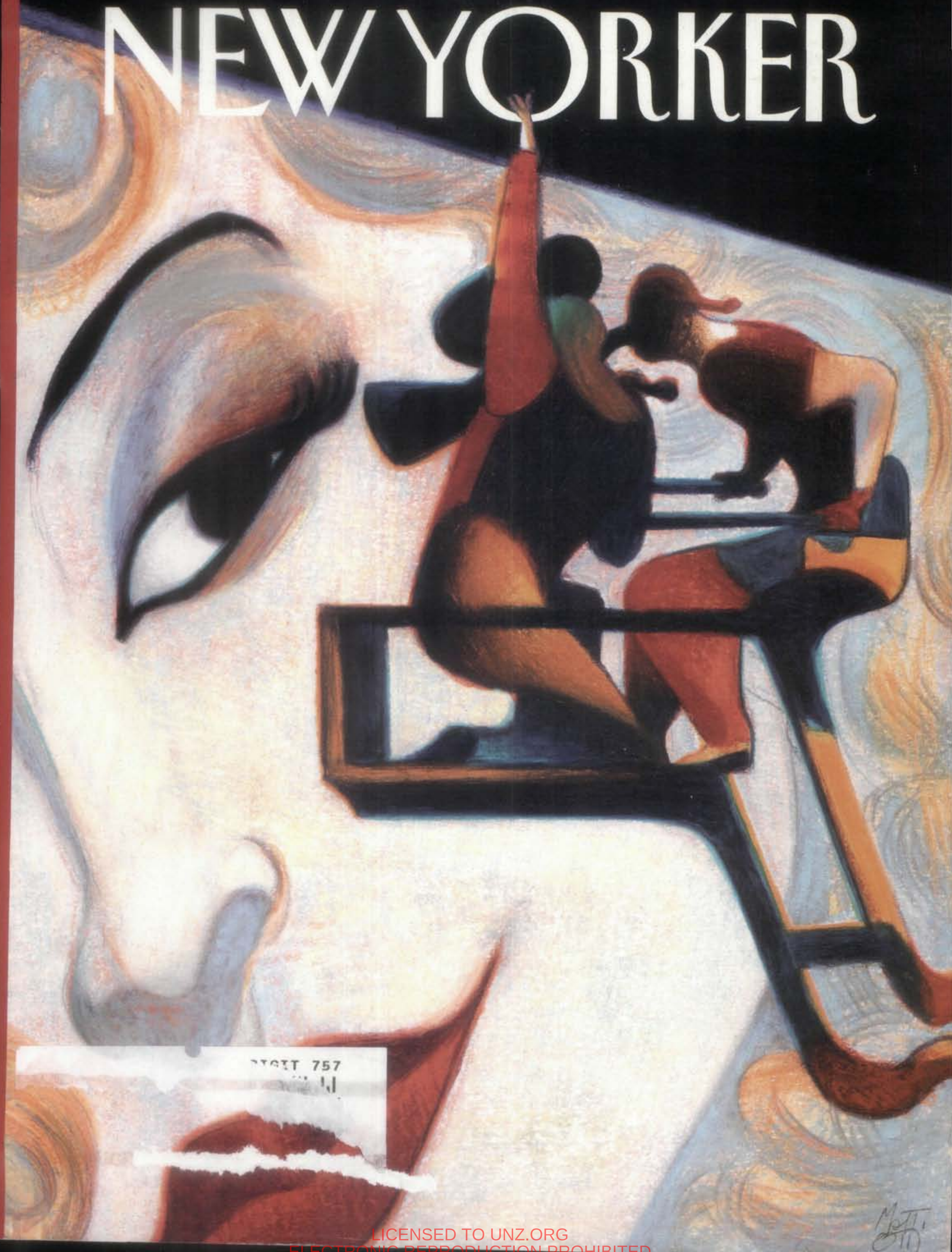

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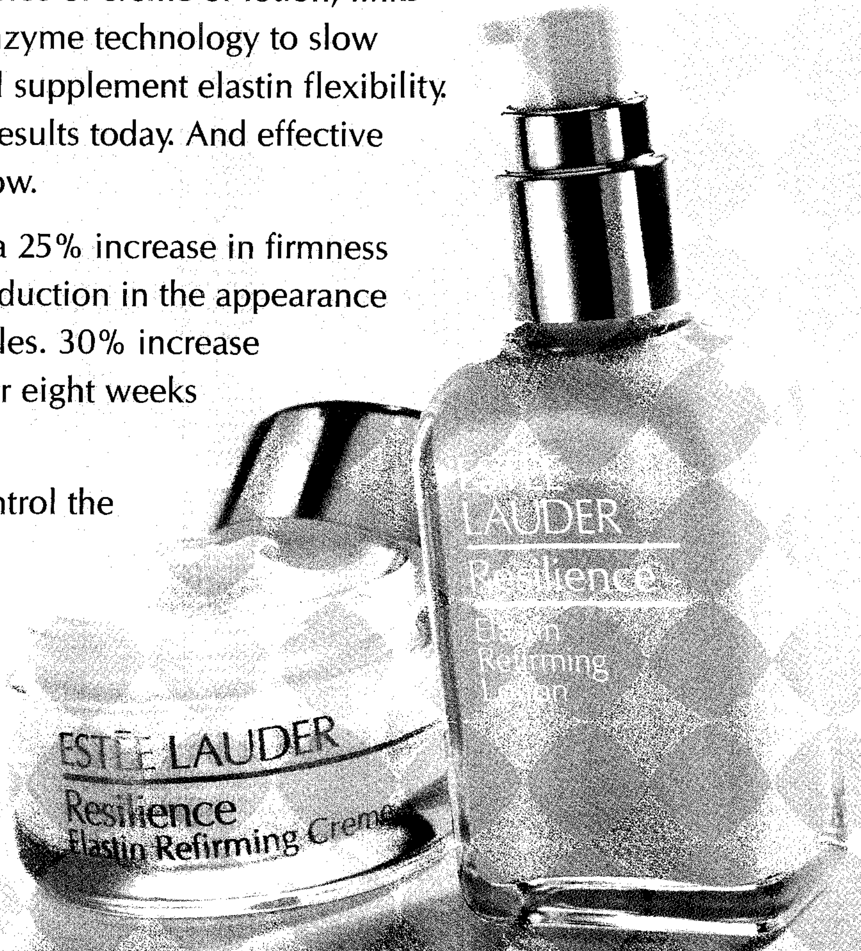
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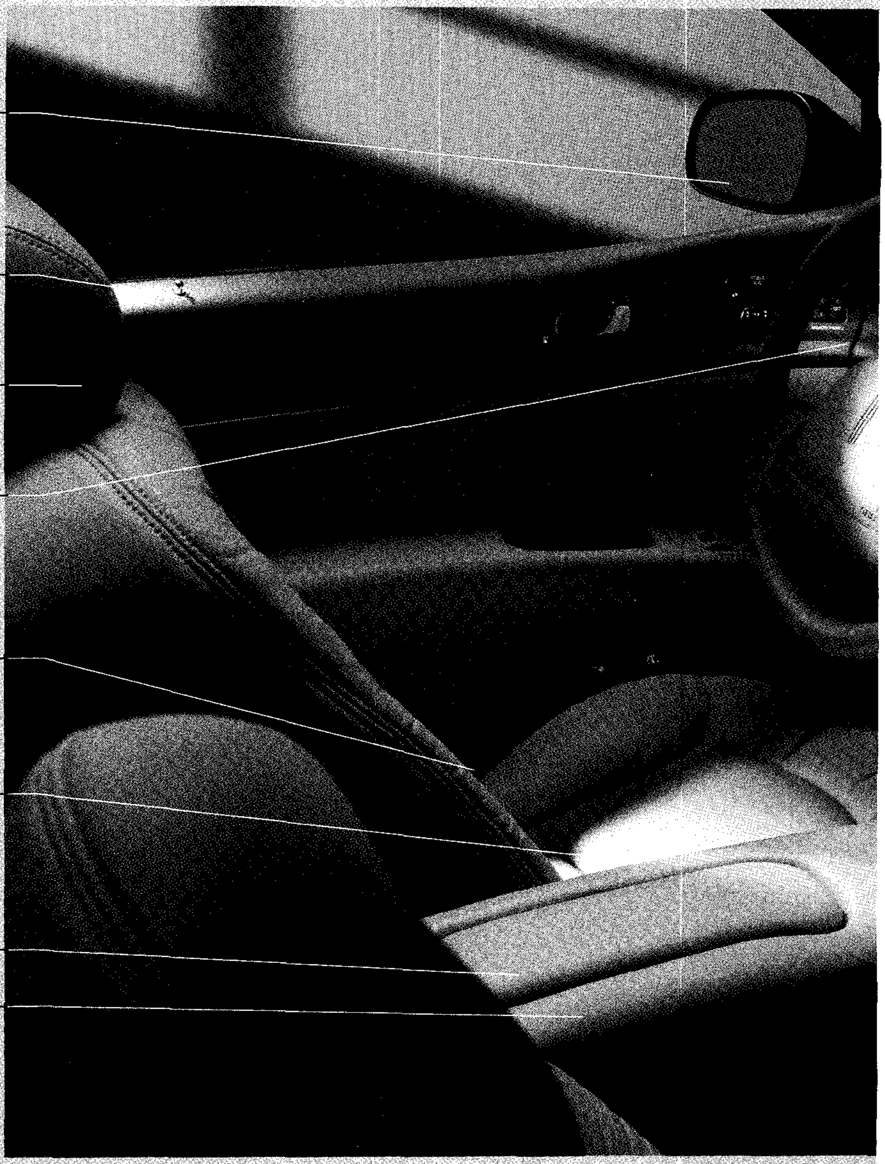

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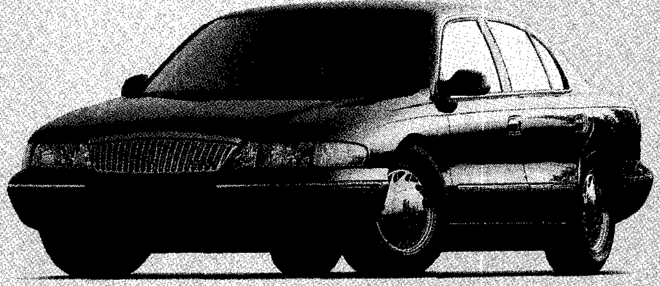

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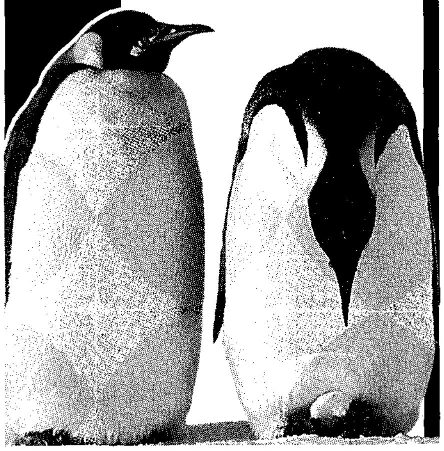

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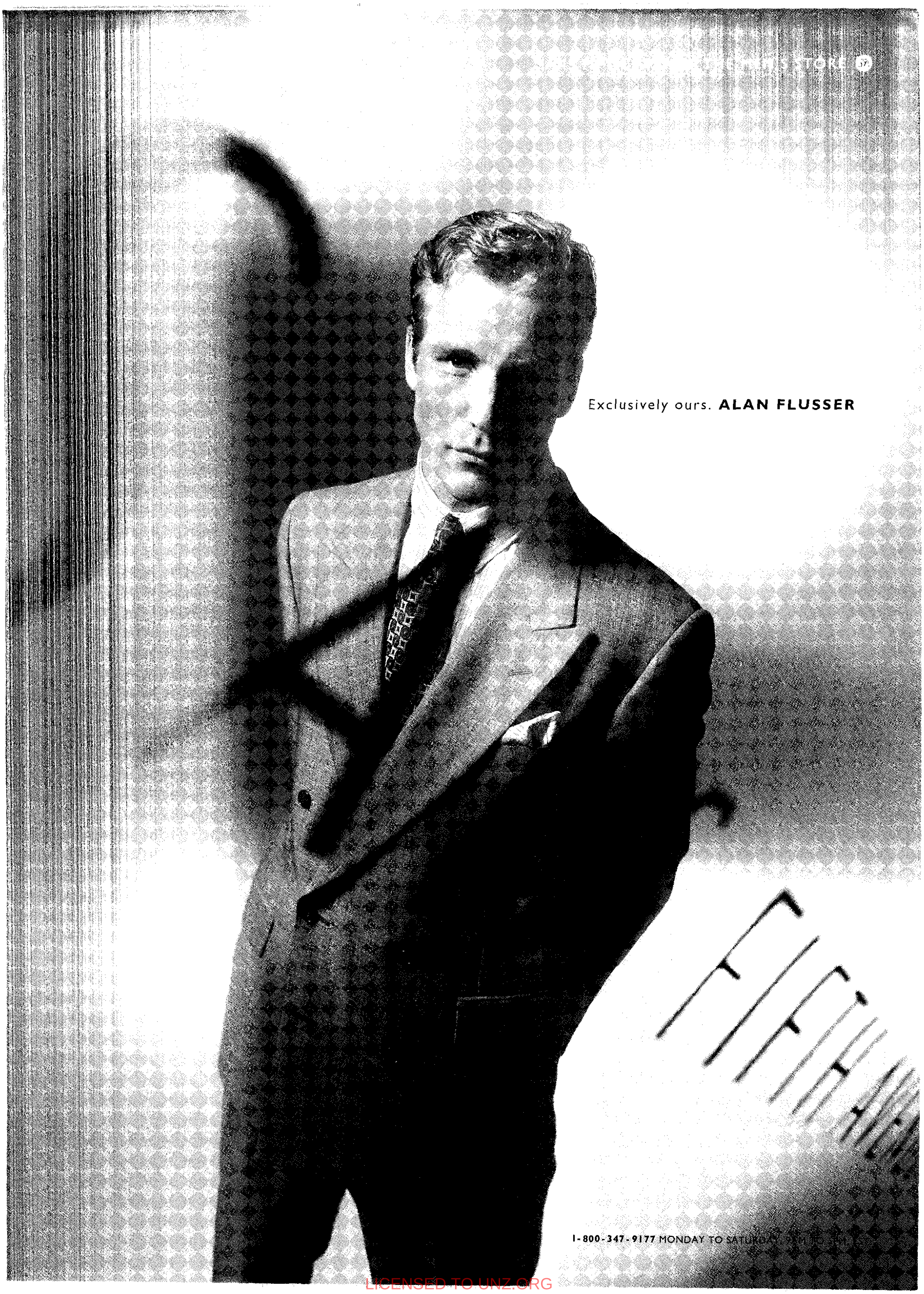
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COMMENT

CONTRACT WITH ACADEMIA

The culture war's threat to the educational social compact.

A LAMENTABLE record was set last week. At the request of a billionaire alumnus, Lee M. Bass, Yale University returned twenty million dollars that Mr. Bass had donated for the teaching of courses on Western civilization—the largest rescinded donation, apparently, in the history of American education.

To the traditionalists at Yale, the Bass gift had represented a welcome chance to correct what they saw as a drift away from liberal education toward "multiculturalism." To the "politically correct" crowd, Mr. Bass's stipulation that his money be used for a new Western Civ course seemed redundant and retrograde, since much of Yale's humanities curriculum is already devoted to the high culture of the West. In an academic atmosphere where flogging "dead white males" has become standard practice, and soap operas and pornography have entered the curriculum as legitimate "texts" for study, it's hardly surprising that donors like Mr. Bass are trying to intervene. When, however, he requested control not only over the subject matter but also over the choice of instructors who would teach "his" course, the Yale community came together in a principled consensus that no amount of money would be worth countenancing Steinbrennerism in the academy.

So Yale's debate about what to do with Mr. Bass's money is history. But the fuss signaled a conflict that goes far beyond New Haven. Universities have always had uneasy relations with their benefactors—the wealthy individuals who support them with gifts and bequests, and the middle-class parents on whose tuition and taxes they depend. On the one hand, universities are deeply "conservative" institutions—financed by private endowments, public funds, and fees collected from parents who hope, at considerable sacrifice, to purchase a prosperous future for their children. Such financial commitments are acts of faith in the culture in which the money was earned, inherited, or borrowed. Until now, private universities have been beneficiaries of this cashable faith because they have been places where the culture in which alumni prospered has been transmitted to their children, and, through the mechanism of financial aid, disseminated to some who were previously excluded from its benefits.

On the other hand, universities are

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"I hear we've had another rash of Elvis sightings."

meant to foster suspicion toward every untested piety and to raise doubts about every axiom. They are, properly, places of experiment and irreverence; they will never please those who expect them to be mainly curatorial. The few years that most people spend in the university are *supposed* to be a time of ferment; and especially now, in the national climate of reaction, universities have an obligation to keep alive the spirit of blasphemy that has always been part of the true life of the mind.

How well any university holds these two functions in equilibrium is an index of its health. By this measure, things are out of balance at many places besides Yale. As both sides—"politically correct" younger faculty and alarmed older alumni—harden their positions, fund-raisers find it increasingly difficult to obtain endowments for chairs and programs in the humanities. At Yale, the most famous member of the humanities faculty, Harold Bloom, has denounced the takeover of literary studies by what he calls the "resentniks." Harvard last week was the happy recipient of a seventy-million-dollar gift from John L. and Frances Lehman Loeb, but none of it was earmarked for the planned (Your Name Here) Humanities Center: it has yet to find its donor.

The *Wall Street Journal*, which functions as a kind of All Ivy League alumni bulletin, has described the Bass controversy as an "object lesson to alumni who come bearing large gifts." The *Journal* is waging a campaign against multiculturalism, slamming universities as sanctuaries for what William Bennett calls "the radical nihilism of post-modern art; homosexual and lesbian self-celebration; Marxism; Neo-Marxism; radical feminism and multiculturalism; deconstructionism; and various manifestations of political correctness."

Polemical label-mongering of this kind doesn't do much to advance reasoned discussion. But Mr. Bennett as a symptom is more significant than Mr. Bennett as an analyst. He articulates a widespread public sense that universities have become places where the idea of a collective American heritage is no longer safe from derision, and where the writings of the oppressed have replaced time-honored Great Books as the best works through which students are invited to study (now with anger and reproach) what used to be called (with reverence) the "Western mind."

A young woman who is an English major at a distinguished liberal-arts college recently wrote in a letter to a friend, "I have already read Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Amy Tan, Richard Wright, Malcolm X, Toni Morrison, Gabriel García Márquez, Kate Chopin, Adrienne Rich, and Alice Walker. I have never had to read for school any Hemingway, Faulkner, Thoreau, Joyce, Steinbeck, James Fenimore Cooper, Blake, Melville, Jack London, Virginia Woolf, Milton, Poe, Donne, Keats, Shelley, Byron, Wordsworth, Wilder, Homer—the list goes on." Her point was not that there is anything wrong with the inclusion of the first list but that there *is* something wrong with the exclusion of the second.

Either/or dogmatism is the problem. All the writers on the first ("politically correct") list have been readers of the second; and all the writers on the second ("Western mind") list would have been interested in the first. If the confrontational mood—which afflicts some faculty members and university patrons far more than it does real readers and writers—continues to harden, more institutions will find themselves in the kind of impasse that Yale came up against in trying to negotiate a compromise with Mr. Bass. This is more than a passing instance of the perennial friction between academia and society. It is a standoff that threatens the unstated compact between universities and the middle class which accounts, in large part, for what has been a golden age for American higher education since the Second World War. Under this compact, the middle class consented to pay a lot, and, especially since the nineteen-sixties, to pay even more in order to subsidize those who could not pay; in return, the university agreed to inculcate habits of intellectual discipline in their children, and to justify their faith that America remains a society where what you know and what you can do are more important than who, in some genealogical sense, you are.

This bargain is beginning to come apart. Given the post-Cold War contraction of government support for defense-related research, the exploding cost of fringe benefits for students, faculty, and staff, and the rise of tuition to insupportable levels, universities have never been more vulnerable than they are today. The institutions that continue to thrive will be the ones that find a way to encourage daring, experimental thought, unpopular as it may be with their financial supporters, while continuing to honor the traditions that their alumni learned in the schools they remember. The Bass fiasco has made that balance harder than ever to achieve. —ANDREW DELBANCO

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IN THE MAIL

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

After reading Alec Wilkinson's "A Night at the Beast House" (A Reporter at Large, February 13th), I've got to ask whether I'm supposed to feel bad because Don Paradis was convicted of a murder he may not have committed rather than the one he may have contributed to. The legal fine points here are beyond me, but please do not let this man become my neighbor. Give him life in prison and spend the money we've spent on his defense where we can get a bang for our buck rather than on this piece of our underbelly.

LINDA TUBBS
Portland, Ore.

Mr. Wilkinson's article shows why many people in this country believe that the death penalty should be abolished. In and of itself, it is a punishment we will probably never all agree on. The problem with it, whether you believe in it or not, is its seemingly capricious application. Whoever committed the murder in Don Paradis's case certainly deserves terrible punishment. Yet, from the shifting stories of the witnesses and the apparent shortcomings of the lawyers and law-enforcement officials, one can never really be sure who was to blame. It seems just as likely that Paradis is telling the truth as that he isn't. The problem is that in murder cases, as in most situations in life, the picture is not clear. It is against this background that many in the United States face, and become victims of, the death penalty.

RAYMOND A. BORGERSON
West Palm Beach, Fla.

HOOKED ON LOOKS

In a manner reminiscent of adolescent boys' schoolyard taunts, the worst criticism that James Wolcott (On Television, February 13th) can level at the "supervixens" Peggy Noonan and Arianna Stassinopoulos Huffington is directed at the way they look. Wolcott's predictable critical tack is to focus on the way each woman presents herself; he writes that Noonan "listens with her entire head" (horrors!), while Huffington's "gracious smile hardens into granite and her eyes become icepicks." Is it possible that Wolcott's rhetoric can't allow for the idea that these women are more than their power hair and beautifully tailored suits?

As for Wolcott's notion that "it would be absurd to think of people like Hemingway and George Eliot and Garbo reinventing themselves," and that in fact each of them had "a core of sensibility," it's fantastical, and hardly constitutes compelling criticism of Noonan's and Huffington's "reinventing" themselves.

SIOBHAN REAGAN
New York City

DAS CAPITOL?

Hendrik Hertzberg's Comment "Marxism: The Sequel" (February 13th) is a remarkable bit of sophistry, an example of analogies run amok. The idea of progress occurring in a specific number of stages has served as a paradigm of social-science analysis for centuries, but to equate Marxism-Leninism with what Hertzberg calls "Tofflerism-Gingrichism" barely hides his liberal agenda and obscures the isms he describes. Marxism-Leninism is a theory of revolution and society rooted in historical experience; Tofflerism-Gingrichism is futurist fantasy. And there are differences between mentor and messiah. Gingrichism is a libertarian variant of Tofflerist futurism, a vision of a body politic shorn of all social engineering and state intervention. It is a philosophy of the anti-élite élite,

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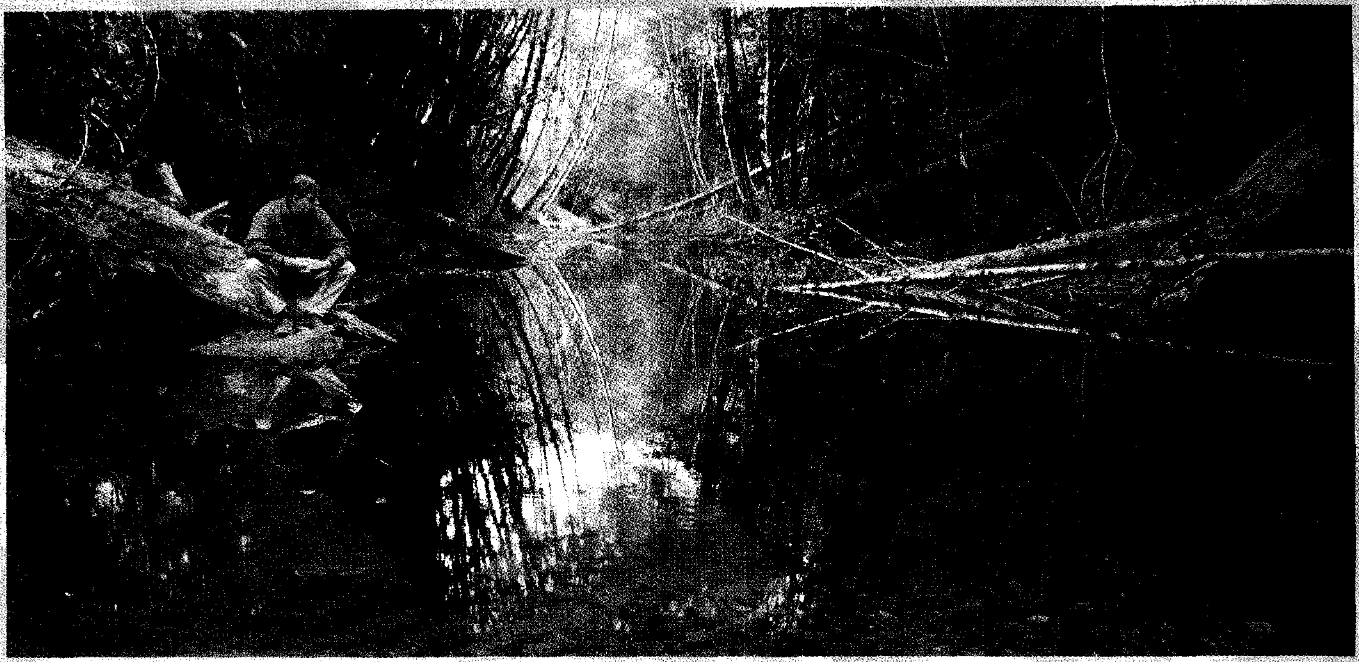

believe the same thing. When we learned that the Coho salmon and Steelhead trout were struggling to survive, we came up with a plan to help. We're putting large boulders and logs in the rivers to create calm pools where

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the small fish can grow and survive until they head out to the ocean. It was something that needed to be done to help the fish. And it feels good to know that my company is doing it." *Dick Patton, Resource Manager*

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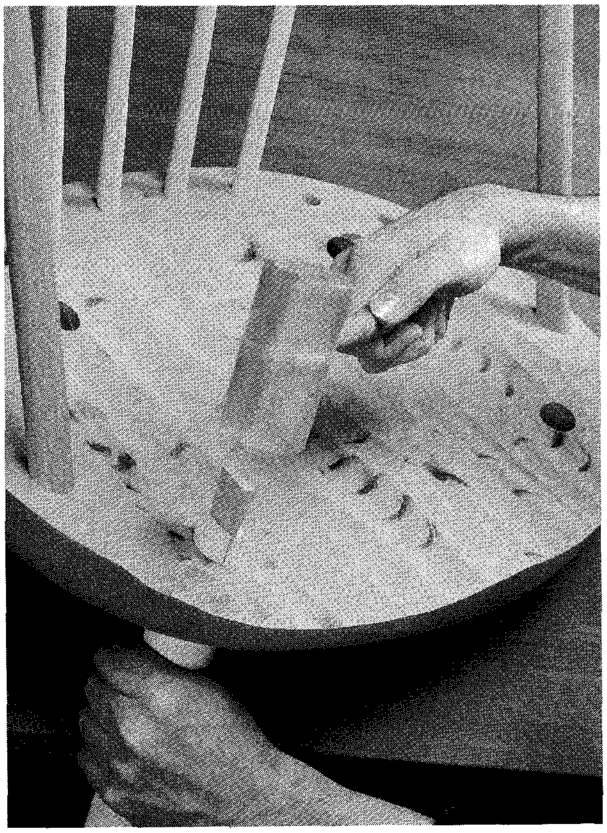

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a populist barbarism in Jeffersonian guise. Such a devolutionary development is the surest evidence that we as a civilization are not riding a Tofflerist Third Wave but are instead suffering from a severe cultural lag.

Tom August
Milwaukee, Wis.

Until I read Mr. Hertzberg's "Marxism: The Sequel," I was beginning to wonder if anyone else had noticed the resemblance. Gingrich's "orphanages" mirror the Russian and Chinese Communists' all-encompassing child-care systems and go a step further. At least in China parents take their children home on weekends. Norman Thomas, on being asked if he was disappointed at the failure of the Socialist Party, replied, in effect, that since many of his ideas had been adopted by other parties it didn't really matter what the ideas were called. Is Marxism going to win after all?

Amalia A. Jacobucci
Centerville, Mass.

I wonder if Newt Gingrich teaches his history class history's first lesson: Beware of maniacs who would straighten out society.

Michael Vidor
Alsea, Ore.

BACK TALK

I was disappointed to read your commentary on the theatre production "Love! Valour! Compassion!" (The Talk of the Town, February 13th). By homing in on one actor's genitalia, the article missed the truly pertinent messages of the production. The point is that the gay community is much more than a homogeneous group of sex-driven clones. Articles such as this perpetuate the erroneous belief that the gay community is shallow and devoid of the qualities that define the heterosexual community—the qualities that grant it validity in the eyes of the greater American society.

Nathaniel T. Antman
Amherst, Mass.

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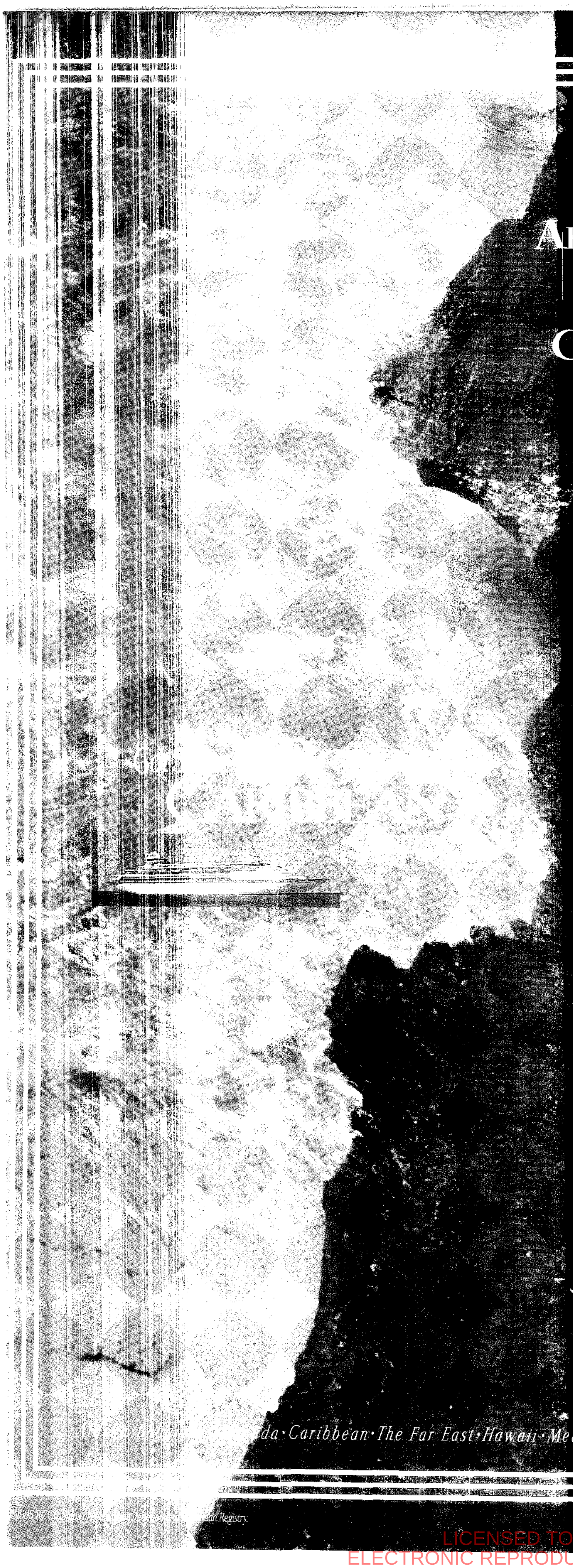

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GOINGS ON

ABOUT TOWN

THE THEATRE

Indefatigable

CHARLES REPOLE has the exuberant energy of a Mickey Rooney character, and with all the theatrics he's got going, it's a good thing. The musical-comedy director's concert version of Irving Berlin's "Call Me Madam," which had a three-night run last month at City Center, has just been recorded on DRG Records. Repole is directing the annual Easter Bonnet show for Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS, which comes to the Palace on April 10-11. And on March 28, his staging of "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," a hit last fall at the Goodspeed Opera House, will begin previews at the Lyceum under the auspices of the National Actors Theatre.

Although the original production of "Blondes," back in 1949, made Carol Channing a star as the wide-eyed golddigger Lorelei Lee, the version that most people remember is the 1953 movie, with Marilyn Monroe. Before Repole began rehearsals, he says, he told the show's composer, the late Jule Styne, that he didn't want his Lorelei, KT Sullivan, to imitate Marilyn. "Styne agreed with me. He said, 'Marilyn was not Lorelei. Marilyn was Marilyn.'" Not that Repole wants to diminish the character's sex appeal. "Whenever you've got a shapely body onstage, sex will be there," he notes cheerfully. But he does insist on Lorelei's innocence: "She's not a trollop; she's not a hooker. When she says something, she truly believes it."

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26	27	28				

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

Arcadia—The American première of Tom Stoppard's 1993 play, set in 1809 and the present. With Blair Brown and Victor Garber. In previews. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

Don Juan in Chicago—The legendary Spanish seducer leaves Seville for twentieth-century Chicago in a new comedy by David Ives (of "All in the Timing" fame). Opens March 22 at 8. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052.)

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes—KT Sullivan stars in the Goodspeed Opera House production of the 1949 musical with a book by Anita Loos and Joseph Fields, a score by Jule Styne, and lyrics by Leo Robin. Charles Repole is the director. Previews begin March 28. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 239-6280.)

Having Our Say—Mary Alice and Gloria Foster star in an adaptation of Sarah Louise and Anne Elizabeth Delany's best-selling book "Having Our Say: The Delany Sisters' First 100 Years." Adapted and directed by Emily Mann. In previews. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying—Matthew Broderick is the ambitious window-washer J. Pierrepont Finch in this revival of the 1961 musical. The score and lyrics are by Frank Loesser; the book is by Abe Burrows, Jack Weinstock, and Willie Gilbert. Two previews on March 22. Opens March 23 at 6:30. (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

Luck, Pluck & Virtue—Neil Patrick Harris ("Doogie Howser") stars in a new play by James Lapine, which is based on the 1934 Nathanael West novel, "A Cool Million." In previews. (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 239-6200.)

Rob Becker's Defending the Caveman—A one-man comedy about the relationship between men and women, written and performed by Mr. Becker. Previews through March 25. Opens March 26 at 7. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 307-4100.)

Rush Limbaugh in Night School—In Charlie Varon's one-man play, the conservative talk-show host is taking Spanish at the New School with a bunch of left-wingers. Previews through March 25. Opens March 28 at 8. (Second Stage, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200.)

Three Viewings—Jeffrey Hatcher's play, which is set in a funeral home, consists of three monologues, delivered by Buck Henry, Penny Fuller, and Margaret Whitton. In previews. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

Watbanaland—A play about a woman (Lisa Emery), who wants to have a baby, and her husband (David Chandler), who doesn't. Written by Doug Wright. In previews. (WPA Theatre, 519 W. 23rd St. 206-0523.)

OPENED RECENTLY

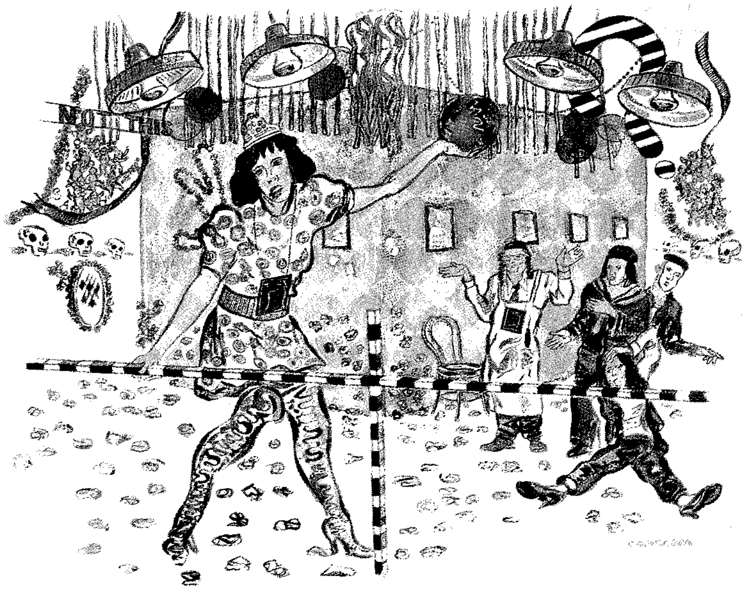
Awake and Sing!—Tovah Feldshuh, Stephen Lang, and Avery Schreiber in a revival of Clifford Odets' 1935 drama about a struggling Bronx family. (Playhouse 91, 316 E. 91st St. 831-2000. Closes April 2.)

Beauty's Daughter—One of the dozen or so characters that Dael Orlandersmith portrays in her one-woman show offers this worldly counsel: "Never show your heart." Though she adopts a hard-shelled stage posture, her depictions of the characters in her native East Harlem neighborhood—some broken, some on the way down—are passionate and full of insight. Her style, a blend of impersonation and chant, can be heavy-handed sometimes, but she is attempting to reach those who are about to slide, and in the persona of a young woman named Dianne, she offers an example of someone who is determined to prevail. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 840-3074. Closes March 26.)

Camping with Henry & Tom—Henry Ford (John Cunningham), Thomas Edison (Robert Prosky), and Warren Harding (Ken Howard) are out camping one day. . . . So begins Mark St. Germain's fictional account of an actual woodland episode from 1921. The talk around the campfire is, unsurprisingly, about power: Ford lusts after it, Harding wants to abdicate it, and Edison doesn't give a good God damn. In the peaceful-looking copse that James Leonard Joy has designed, history comes alive, but it doesn't go much beyond the bickering and joshing of these three flawed titans. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200.)

Carmen—Ridiculous Theatrical Company playwrights Everett Quinton and Eureka have borrowed liberally from classic camp movies (especially "Caged") to come up with a suitably Ridiculous take on Prosper Mérimée's tragic tale. Quinton is in top form as the hot-blooded, coldhearted gypsy. (Charles Ludlam Theatre, 1 Sheridan Sq. 691-2271.)

The Compleat Works of Wllm Shkspr (Abridged)—This slapstick hour and a half romp through the Bard's œuvre, car-



Jan Leslie Harding, in Richard Foreman's "I've Got the Shakes."

PIER CONSAGRA

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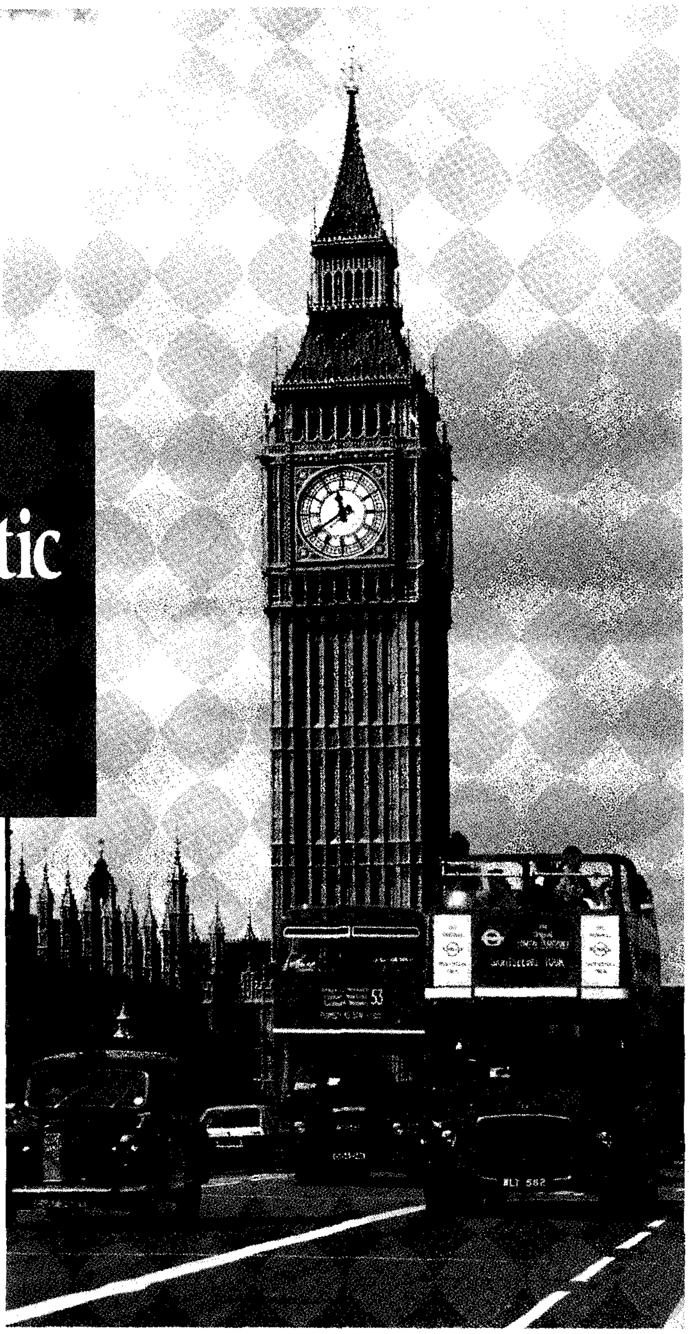

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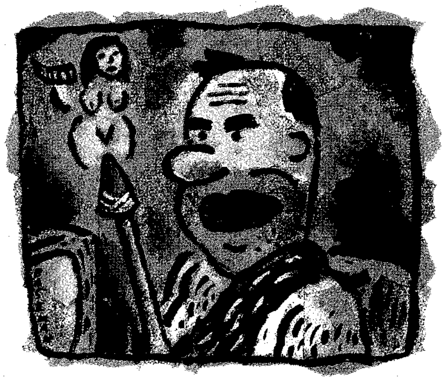
ried out by three fine young gentlemen in high-tops, is utterly sophomoric and a complete waste of time—like some of the best things in life. (Westside Theatre, 407 W. 43rd St. 307-4100.)

Damn Yankees—There's just no stopping Jerry Lewis: the King of Comedy and the King of France is now, in his Broadway début, the King of the Underworld—the Devil himself. Theatregoers hoping to see him bring some of his clownish, cross-eyed shtick to the role will not be disappointed: the old pro delivers the goods. And Charlotte d'Amboise is a sensational Lola—she delivers the goods and then some. (Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.)



"Rob Becker's Defending the Caveman."

GARY BASEMAN

Death Defying Acts—Three sub-par one-act comedies, by David Mamet, Elaine May, and Woody Allen, that have the words "Written to Order" stamped all over them. Despite a couple of good, sly performances by Linda Lavin and Gerry Becker, the evening is a big downer—pushy and full of undigested viciousness. (3/20/95) (Variety Arts, Third Ave. at 14th St. 239-6200.)

Family Business—The *fils-et-père* team of Ain and David Gordon wrote, directed, and appears in this comedy about a family of plumbers. Valda Setterfield (mother of Ain, wife of David) rounds out the cast. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 302-6989.)

Hapgood—Tom Stoppard's 1988 play looks at the world of espionage through the lens of particle physics, and the production is as mesmerizing as the play is bewildering. Stockard Channing, Josef Sommer, and David Strathairn give confident, watchable performances. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200. Closes March 26.)

The Heiress—A revival of Ruth and Augustus Goetz's 1947 adaptation of Henry James' "Washington Square," directed by Gerald Gutierrez, that is emotionally brimming and, thanks to several memorable performances, alive with tension. Cherry Jones, who plays the heiress of the title, is exquisitely—almost unbearably—vulnerable; Philip Bosco brings a terrible authority to the role of her dutiful but soul-crushing father. And the wonderful Frances Sternhagen is, not surprisingly, touching and funny as a widowed aunt. (3/20/95) (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

Henry VI—This distillation of three plays into two long, fairly independent parts lays bare the machinations surrounding the Wars of the Roses—so bare, unfortunately, that there's little sense of character left, and you don't care who wins. A few actors (John Campion as the Duke of York, Jack Wetherall as the Earl of Warwick, Trellis Stepter as the young Richard III) invigorate their scenes through sheer force of personality, but for the most part there's a lot of yelling and running around on a very nice set. Adapted and directed by Barry Kyle. (St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 279-4200. Closes April 8.)

Holiday Heart—Cheryl L. West's thoughtful and thought-provoking play, which takes place in inner-city Chicago, is named after its central character—an out-there, over-the-top drag queen (if that's not a tautology) who is the Rock of Gibraltar to a troubled next-door neighbor and her young daughter, and who is played with great vitality by Keith Randolph Smith. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes April 9.)

Incommunicado—Tom Dulack's drama about Ezra Pound's confinement on an American military base in Italy at the end of the Second World War. Tom Aldredge portrays the poet. (Judith Anderson, 422 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

I've Got the Shakes—The characters in Richard Foreman's latest piece of metaphysical mischief are the kind of oddballs that the March Hare might welcome at one of his tea parties; the costumes are clownish curiosities, and the set looks like a Mardi Gras float cluttered with flea-market finds. In the center of it all, Jan Leslie Harding gives a remarkably composed performance as Madeline X, a somewhat bewildered teacher who hopes to enlighten a place called Ignorance. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650.)

Jack's Holiday—Jack the Ripper comes to New York in 1891, in a new musical by Randy Courts and Mark St. Germain. With Allen Fitzpatrick in the title role, Judy Blazer, Greg Naughton, and Dennis Parlato. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200. Closes March 26.)

Jelly Roll!—The snakily elegant Vernel Bagneris plays Jelly Roll Morton, in a terrific show that traces the musician's transformation from New Orleans dandy into jazz legend. Morten Gunnar Larsen provides the thrilling piano accompaniment. (47th Street Theatre, 304 W. 47th St. 265-1086.)

Laura Dennis—The Signature Theatre Company concludes its Horton Foote season with this new play. (Kampo Cultural Center, 31 Bond St. 279-4200. Closes April 9.)

Love! Valour! Compassion!—The eight gay men in Terrence McNally's beautifully written drama connect in ways that almost any nuclear family would envy. Under the nimble direction of Joe Mantello, seven actors (including Stephen Bogardus, John Glover—doing double duty as identical twins—and the wonderful Nathan Lane) present humbling evidence of what love is and can be. (11/14/94) (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

The Man Who—Director Peter Brook's adaptation of "The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat," Oliver Sacks' collection of case studies. (BAM's Majestic Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 1-718 636-4100. Closes April 9.)

Manhattan Class Company—The group's seventh annual one-act festival features plays by Peter Lefcourt, Rafael Lima, Patrick Breen, and Tom Burnett. (120 W. 28th St. 727-7765. Closes April 1.)

Measure for Measure and **Titus Andronicus**—Take your Shakespearean pick; the Basic Theatre's productions are running in repertory. (SoHo Rep, 46 Walker St. 334-0962.)

Miami Stories: Bellow, Malamud & Klavan—An evening of one-act comedies: Saul Bellow's "A Wen," Laurence Klavan and Martin Blank's "The Magic Barrel" (based on the story by Bernard Malamud), and Mr. Klavan's own "If Walls Could Talk." (American Jewish Theatre, 307 W. 26th St. 633-9797. Closes April 2.)

The Molière Comedies—Richard Wilbur dedicated his translations of "The School for Husbands" and "The Imaginary Cuckold" to Brian Bedford, and Mr. Bedford more than lives up to the accolade in two wonderful comic performances—as a crusty old fool and a blustery old fool. (Roundabout, Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400. Closes March 26.)

Seduced—Sam Shepard's 1979 play, presented by Cooper Square Workshop. (Kraine, 85 E. 4th St. 332-0727. Closes March 26.)

Show Boat—Harold Prince's bighearted production of the 1927 Jerome Kern–Oscar Hammerstein II musical is epic-size, full of life and full of vision. With John McMartin and Elaine Stritch as the patriarch and the matriarch of the floating theatre, and Lonette McKee, whose moving rendition of "Bill" is the show's most intimate moment. (10/17/94) (Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

Smokey Joe's Café—The Songs of Leiber and Stoller—A feast of music by those cool cats Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, performed by a cast with Grade A lungs and legs. The songs themselves—"Hound Dog," "Yakety Yak," "On Broadway," "Stand by Me," and a few dozen more—are a blissful pop marriage of black and white. But the accompanying band has about as much soul as a run-of-the-mill combo at a wedding reception. (Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200.)

Sunset Boulevard—Glenn Close has taken the monumental role of Norma Desmond and made it something all her own, in Andrew Lloyd Webber's homage to Billy Wilder and Charles Brackett's 1950 fable of Hollywood corruption and dementia. (12/5/94) (Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4007.)

Swingtime Canteen—A forties musical revue, with an all-female cast, including Alison Fraser and Emily Loesser. (Blue Angel, 321 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

That's Life!—A seriocomic revue about the variety of Jewish life in America. (Theatre East, 211 E. 60th St. 838-9090.)

Too Jewish?—Avi Hoffman's musical-theatre piece extolling the virtues of Yiddish. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

Translations—A new production of Brian Friel's 1981 play, starring Dana Delany, Brian Dennehy, Donal Donnelly, and Rufus Sewell. Howard Davies is the director. (Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Trust—A look at love in the nineties, by Steven Dietz. (Perry Street Theatre, 31 Perry St. 522-1402. Closes April 2.)

Uncle Bob—Austin Pendleton's new two-man play, which takes place in a Manhattan apartment, is an intense, claustrophobic, and sometimes very funny two-day encounter between a dying middle-aged man and his nihilistic college-dropout nephew. Both George Morfogen and the young Adam Stein give riveting, discomfiting performances. (Mint Theatre Company, 311 W. 43rd St., fifth floor. 315-9434.)

Varla and the Man Who Got Away—The putative daughter of Ethel Merman and Ernest Borgnine has overcome the trauma of having been shunned as a child and is ready to claim her show-biz birthright on the legitimate stage. It's a travesty indeed that this giggly, mock-autobiographical cabaret show follows up its glamorous premise with nothing but predictable camp. If only the six-foot, red-headed Varla Jean Merman (Jeff Roberson) had an ounce of her mother's vocal talent—or her *father's*—she would be sitting pretty. (Westbeth Theatre Center, 151 Bank St. 741-0391.)

We Won't Pay! We Won't Pay!—The New York Italian Theatre Company's hilarious production of Dario Fo's 1974 play. It's his usual mix of perfectly wrought farce and leftist politics, but the farce wins out, thanks to the sure touch of director Piero Dusa and to a terrific cast. Francesca Di Mauro is particularly good as a Milanese housewife who participates in a grocery-store looting in protest of rising prices, setting off a string of events too funny to give away here. The performances alternate between English and Italian. (Duality Playhouse, 119 W. 23rd St. 929-6392. Closes April 2.)

LONG RUNS

All in the Timing: John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. . . . **Beauty and the Beast:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100. . . . **Blood Brothers:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **Blue Man Group/Tubes:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **Cats:**

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THE THEATRE—*Cont'd*

Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **CRAZY FOR YOU:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **GREASE!:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200. . . . **AN INSPECTOR CALLS:** Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **JACKIE MASON: POLITICALLY INCORRECT:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 477-2477. . . . **THREE TALL WOMEN:** Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. John's Church, 81 Christopher St. 279-4200. . . . **THE WHO'S TOMMY:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

IN ANOTHER CATEGORY— PERFORMANCE ART, ETC.

PASS THE BLUTWURST, BITTE—John Kelly reprises his performance piece about the life of the artist Egon Schiele. (La Mama Annex, 66 E. 4th St. 475-7710. March 22-25 at 7:30 and March 26 at 3.)

WRAPPED UP, TIED UP & TANGLED—Peggy Pettitt examines domestic violence, among other issues, in her latest solo work. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. March 23-26 at 7:30.)

DANCE

Weighty Stories

At a recent rehearsal for Ronald K. Brown's "Lessons"—one of six pieces that the Second Avenue Dance Company will be performing this weekend at the Tisch School of the Arts—the company's thirty-four members, all students in their final year at N.Y.U., danced barefoot or in socks. But when Brown got up to demonstrate a phrase, he danced in work boots. "In European art forms, the dancers rise up above the floor," the choreographer explained later. "I'm trying to get them closer to the ground."

Brown usually dances with and choreographs for his own predominantly African-American company, Evidence. His last full-length work, "Dirt Road," was about a family funeral and the way it brought people together. "Lessons," he says, is the next step; it deals with "how our elders prepare us to live when they themselves are close to death." As the dancers perform, offstage voices make the kind of pronouncements that sound peculiar but nonetheless stick with you. ("Don't give a man a pair of shoes as a gift because he will walk out of your life.") "Dirt Road" was much praised for its loose narrative form, which still left plenty of room for mystery; narrative remains a strong element in the new piece. "Stories get the dancers to focus on something other than themselves," he says. "They help them break out of ideas they might be confined in, so they can show concern for something else."

DANCE THEATRE OF HARLEM—Final performances of the season. March 22 at 8 and March 25 at 2 and 8: "Etosha," "Voluntaries," and "Ginastera." . . . ¶ March 23 and March 24 at 8 and March 26 at 3: "The Joplin Dances," "Dialogues," and "A Song for Dead Warriors." (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 1-718 636-4100.)

FELD BALLETS/NY—March 22 at 8: "A Footstep of Air," "Over the Pavement," and "Gnossiennes." . . . ¶ March 23 at 8: "Consort," "Kore," "Ogive," and "Doghead & Godcatchers." . . . ¶ March 24 at 8: "Fauna," "Ion," "Over the Pavement," and "Ludwig Gambits." . . . ¶ March 25 at 2, a family matinée: "Sleep Study," three commedia-dell'arte dances, "Excursions," "Kore," and selections from "The Jig Is Up." . . . ¶ March 25 at 8 and March 26 at 2: "Aurora II," "Love Song Waltzes," and "Doo Dah Day." . . . ¶ March 26 at 7:30: "A Footstep of Air," "Evoe," "Chi," and "Wolfgang Strategies." . . . ¶ March 28 at 8: "Contra Pose," "Gnossiennes," and "The Jig Is Up." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Through April 9.)

NANCY MEEHAN DANCE COMPANY—For its twenty-third season, the company performs "The Other Side," "Record of an Ocean Cliff," and the première of a new work. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. March 24-26 at 8:30. For information about tickets, call 924-0077.)

"GENCHOU (PHANTOM BIRD)"—In her American début, choreographer Yumi Terayama brings together motifs from ancient and modern Japan—sea serpents and Super Mario Brothers, erotic conflicts and Shinto rites, a two-hundred-inch video screen and such traditional instruments as the flutelike shichiriki—in a five-part work about death and regeneration. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 475-7710. March 23-26 at 8.)

OLGA MESA—The Spanish choreographer makes her American début with a program of solo dances. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 255-5793. March 22-26 at 8.)

"COMMODITIES, IDENTITIES, AND SYNCHRONIZED SWIMMING"—Dean Moss choreographs the movement of dancers, video images of dancers and figurines, and even the video monitors themselves, in a full-length work about cultural fluency and economic flux. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. March 23-25 at 8 and March 26 at 3.)

SECOND AVENUE DANCE COMPANY/95—The thirty-four-member student company, in the première of Ronald K. Brown's "Lessons" and in Doug Varone's "Peak Sacred," Twyla Tharp's "The Fugue," and three works by company choreographers. (Tisch School of the Arts, 111 Second Ave., at 6th St., fifth floor. March 23-24 and March 26-27 at 8, and March 25 at 2 and 8. The performance is free, but for reservations, which are required, call 998-1982.)

DANCE AT HOLY TRINITY—Reconstructions of two works by Paul Sanasardo, "Metallics" (1963) and "Shadows" (1972), and several recent works by Sanasardo's protégé John Passafiume, including the première of "Fall." (Church of the Holy Trinity, 316 E. 88th St. 876-4961. March 23-25 at 8 and March 26 at 2.)

ANDREA MILLS—The choreographer dances "Aquila," a work she developed for Ann Carlson, about a one-winged bird cum Vegas showgirl. Two shorter works, "Absolute Ground" and "Celebrance," are also on the bill. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. March 23-26 at 9.)

BALLET FOLKLÓRICO MEXICANO DE NUEVA YORK—The company performs traditional dances from Veracruz, the Yucatán, Tabasco, and Jalisco. (Bruno Walter Auditorium, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Lincoln Center. March 25 at 2:30. No tickets necessary.)

NIGHT LIFE

At Ease

Pat Metheny no longer rules the jazz charts: after more than a dozen years at the top, he's been usurped by Kenny G. And he couldn't care less. At forty, the graying guitarist already has eight Grammys, and, by jazz standards, he's still enormously popular. Besides, unlike Kenny G, Metheny is an unpredictable, boundary-breaking musician. Over the past two decades, he has recorded with David Bowie, Ornette Coleman, Joni Mitchell, Herbie Hancock, Steve Reich, and his own award-winning group. His new album, "We Live Here," is his twentieth, and as with all his work, from his knotty free-jazz excursions to his fragile acoustic collages, the thread that holds it together is his buttery guitar, a burbling purr that remains one of the most instantly identifiable voices in contemporary music. On March 23, the Pat Metheny Group arrives at the Beacon Theatre for a three-night stand. Recently, Metheny spoke a bit about his career, the new jazz orthodoxy, and the critics who continue to label him a dilettante. "I take it as a compliment," he said. "I don't believe in jazz as a repertory concept. When you listen to a Louis Armstrong record, you can smell the air. But you can't re-create that by taking notes. I feel a real obligation to live in my own time."

CONCERTS

THE BLACK CROWES—For a while they were a younger, feistier version of the Rolling Stones, but these days the Stones impersonate the Stones better than the Black Crowes do. With the Dirty Dozen Brass Band. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 496-7070. March 22 at 8.)

J. D. KING

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NIGHT LIFE–Cont'd

Bucky Pizzarelli—The jazz guitarist. (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. March 22 at 12:30 P.M. Admission by contribution.)

Amy Grant—With Gary Chapman. (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 247-4777. March 23 at 8.)

Max Roach and the Uptown String Quartet—The brilliant drummer performs solo, followed by the U.S.Q., which features his daughter Maxine on viola. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 772-4448. March 23 at 8.)

Billy Taylor Trio—With tenor saxophonist Laura Dreyer. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. March 23 at 7.)

Hassan Hakmoun, at the Cooler.

MARK ULRIKSEN

Pat Metheny Group—Beacon Theatre. 496-7070. March 23-25 at 8.

Oldies Concert—Three Dog Night, Andrew Gold, Rupert Holmes, Looking Glass, and others reprise their hits for thirty-somethings who just can't forget junior high. (Paramount, Madison Square Garden. 465-6741. March 24 at 8.)

American Music Group Dectet—An ensemble that includes the Meridian String Quartet, in a new jazz suite. (Weill Recital Hall, at Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. March 24 at 8.)

Djivan Gasparyan—The Armenian duduk player's January visit was so successful that he's back for one more performance. (Washington Square Church, 135 W. 4th St. March 24 at 8. For information about tickets, call 545-7536.)

Dédé Saint-Prix—A zouk (French-Caribbean dance music) star from Martinique. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 355-6160. March 25 at 8.)

Music and Dance of Vietnam—Featuring the Phong Nguyen Ensemble. (Washington Square Church. March 25 at 8. For information about tickets, call 545-7536.)

Victoria Williams—Even those who have trouble with this Louisiana-bred folksinger's voice—a high, mildly cloying Kewpie-doll instrument—have been charmed by her uncanny talent for songwriting. Last year she released a splendid collection titled "Loose." She has also been waging a graceful battle against multiple sclerosis and has become a stout campaigner for a health-insurance system for musicians. With Vic Chesnutt. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. March 25 at 8.)

Judy Collins—Whitman Hall, Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts, Brooklyn College. 1-718 951-4500. March 25 at 8.

Roulette—Several concerts at the avant-garde-music hangout. March 22: Hamid Drake and Michael Zerang. March 23: Jeffrey Schanzer. March 24: Guy Yarden. March 25: Tom Goldstein and Paul Hoffmann. March 28: Zeena Parkins. (228 West Broadway. 219-8242. Concerts at 9.)

CLUBS

(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type indicates some of the more notable performers in town. Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it is advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

Academy, 234 W. 43rd St.—March 24: **VERUCA SALT.** The nation's latest overrated alternative-rock combo is touring in support of "American Thighs" (the title comes from an AC/DC song—now there was a *real* band). The Salts boast a front woman who sings like a bratty kid and offer inscrutable lyrics like "I killed your baby / I don't know how / So sorry now." As the members of Weezer (see Roseland) recently told *Rolling Stone*, Veruca Salt is *sassy*. With Hazel. (For concert information, call 307-7171.)

Bottom Line, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—March 23: The **UPTOWN HORNS,** with **DAVID JOHANSEN.** March 24: An evening of no-risk listening, with **DAVE FRISHBERG, KATY MOFFATT,** and **LOOSE DIAMONDS.** March 25: **ROCKAPELLA.** Dining.

Chicago B.L.U.E.S., 73 Eighth Ave., at 13th St. (924-9755)—Dedicated to the music of the Windy City. March 22-25: Harmonica heavy **SUGAR BLUE.**

The Cooler, 416 W. 14th St. (229-0785)—March 25: **HASSAN HAKMOUN & ZAHAR.** Hakmoun and his band Zahar hail from Morocco, but they've been living in New York for the past few years. The experience has enriched their music in unusual ways—at times they sound more like Brooklyn than Marrakech. Expect a huge churning sound: North African rhythms, Western melodies, raga, and Hakmoun's soaring, otherworldly voice. Wednesday nights are given over to experimental d.j. spinoffs.

Fez, 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—March 26: **VIC CHESNUTT.** March 27: "The Honeysuckles," a live weekly soap opera. Singer-songwriter **FRANCIS DUNNERY** continues his Tuesday-night residency, and the **MINGUS BIG BAND** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—March 23: Groove specialist **DIONNE FARRIS** (best known as the voice behind Arrested Development's "Tennessee"). . . . ¶ The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday night, at the Continental Club. The dancers share a passion for the Lindy Hop, a dance that involves a lot of whirling and the occasional display of underwear. Sets from eight until midnight. For information on the society, call 696-9737.

Kaptain Banana, 101 Greene St. (343-9000)—French cabaret *en travesti* in SoHo. Three drag queens and eight dancers re-create the Court of Versailles, a carnival in Rio, Marlene Dietrich, and the Andrews Sisters. There's also a singing gorilla. Dining.

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—March 28: A double bill of guitar heroics, with **ADRIAN LEGG** and **HENRY KAISER.** Situated somewhere between Michael Hedges and John Fahey, Legg is a brilliant player whose sensitivity and tone are as astounding as his vast technical skills. Kaiser is a West Coast maverick and Captain Beefheart fanatic who has collaborated with Richard Thompson and Fred Frith.

Limelight, Sixth Ave. at 20th St. (807-7850)—This unholy venue currently plays host to a variety of techno and alternative acts. Wednesday night is Disco 2000.

Manny's Car Wash, 1558 Third Ave., at 87th St. (369-2583)—March 22: **ROOMFUL OF BLUES.** March 23: Guitarist **JOHNNY ALLEN.**

Maxwell's, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken (1-201 798-4064)—March 24: The **KAISERS,** the **PLANET ROCKERS,** and the **NEANDERTHALS.** March 25: **PETE DROGE,** the **SHAMS,** and **MELISSA FERRICK.** March 27: **ARCHERS OF LOAF.**

Mercury Lounge, 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—March 23: **HAL KETCHUM.** March 24: The **BOXING GHANDIS.**

Les Poulets, 16 W. 22nd St. (229-2000)—The name may be French, but the music here is Latin: expect salsa, merengue, and, now and then, cha-cha. March 24: **TITO NIEVES.** March 25: **EDWIN RIVERA** and **RAY SEPULVEDA.** Dining.

Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. (247-0200)—March 28: **WEEZER.** Imagine the Beastie Boys as a pop quartet and you pretty much have Weezer's number. The foursome's Adam Sandleresque shtick grows tiresome fast, but their grungy, guitar-drunk début album (produced by the Cars' Ric Ocasek) shows real promise.

S.O.B.'s, 204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—Through March 23: the original Girl from Ipanema, **ASTRUD GILBERTO.** March 27-28: **CACHAO** and his orchestra. Tuesday nights, S.O.B.'s presents Flipping the Script, a set of rap and poetry, followed by Soul Kitchen, a seventies funk and R. & B. party. Thursday nights belong to Giant Step, a roving collective of musicians, rappers, and d.j.s who mix jazz, funk, and hip-hop. Dining.

Tramps, 51 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—March 22: **DIGABLE PLANETS.** Heavy-duty blues dude **RONNIE EARL** is the main attraction on March 23. March 25: Acid-jazz with the **GROOVE COLLECTIVE.** March 27: Former Yes keyboardist **PATRICK MORAZ.** March 28: Howard Stern staff idiot **STUTTERING JOHN.**

L'Udo, 432 Lafayette St. (388-0978)—Drag diva **JOEY ARIAS** does his "Blue Velvet" and Billie Holiday routine March 23-25. Dining.

Webster Hall, 125 E. 11th St. (353-1600)—A byzantine disco wonderland with four floors, a coffee shop, and a wig boutique. Wednesday is drag night. Psychedelic Thursdays feature grunge acts and cheap beer.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Algonquin Hotel, 59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—Vocalist **JULIE WILSON** begins a monthlong run on March 28. Dining.

Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through March 26: **JAMES MOODY** and the **AL GREY JAZZ ALL-STARS.** A double bill that approaches sublimity. Moody's a twisted sax virtuoso who spikes his bop excursions with right-side-of-the-brain humor. Grey uses his trombone to channel the spirits of swing; his guest will be the great Basie trumpeter Harry (Sweets) Edison. Dining.

Bradley's, 70 University Pl., at 11th St. (228-6440)—Through March 25: a trio featuring **DONALD BROWN** (piano), **ESSIET ESSIET** (bass), and **ERIC WALKER** (drums). Musicians like Brown are the invaluable foot soldiers of the New York jazz scene. A no-nonsense bop modernist with a flair for writing memorable tunes, he's swing stripped right down to the muscle. Pianist **KENNY BARRON** leads a trio on March 26. Dining.

Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—**BARBARA COOK** continues at the Café Carlyle, backed by her longtime pianist and arranger **WALLY HARPER.** Her voice remains almost defiantly that of the nineteen-fifties Broadway ingénue, and her material, particularly her homage to Mabel Mercer, is as supple as a fresh corsage.

Fat Tuesday's, 190 Third Ave., at 17th St. (533-7900)—**MOSE ALLISON,** who plays here with a trio through March 26, is still making the world safe for pissed-off musical anomalies over sixty. Slamming the piano like Jimmy Yancey possessed by the spirits of Monk and Bartók, Allison is nothing less than a national treasure. On Mondays, guitarist-inventor **LES PAUL** leads a trio. Dining.

Fifty Seven Fifty Seven, 57 E. 57th St. (758-5757)—A cool, sumptuous piano-and-bass room in the Four Seasons Hotel. Wednesdays through Saturdays, **DONALD JOHNSTON** is the featured pianist; on weekends he performs with a trio. Dining.

Iridium, 44 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through March 25: the **CYRUS CHESTNUT** trio. He has the mischievous presence of an elf, but make no mistake: pianist Chestnut is a monster.

During his apprentice days with singer Betty Carter, it was obvious that his eminently smart and funky playing portended something special, and now he's delivering on that promise. Dining.

KNICKERBOCKER, 33 University Pl., at 9th St. (228-8490)—March 22-25: Piano-and-bass with PETE MALINVERNI and RUFUS REID.

KNITTING FACTORY, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—For years, JULIUS HEMPHILL (in March 22-23 with a sextet) was the compositional muscle behind the World Saxophone Quartet. He now leads a crack sax choir that translates his celebrated smarts and bluesy wit with a rigor that has been missing from W.S.Q. since his departure. March 25 belongs to the JAZZHOLE, an excellent acid-jazz ensemble featuring three vocalists, two rappers, and more than ten other musicians. March 26: More "Silent Film/Loud Music." This time it's F. W. Murnau's "The Last Laugh," with music by DAVID ARNER. The DAVID MURRAY big band continues its Sunday-night reign. March 28: PRIMA MATERIA plays the music of John Coltrane.

LE MADELEINE, 403 W. 43rd St. (246-2993)—Every Sunday evening, guitar great GENE BERTONCINI lights up this cozy Hell's Kitchen bistro with his simmering melodicism and chordal grace.

METROPOLIS, 31 Union Sq. W. (675-2300)—March 23: RHONDA ROSS (Diana's daughter). March 24-25: BARRY HARRIS and CHARLES DAVIS. Most bop pianists approach their keyboards like Secretariat on a good day, but Harris is a seducer with a satin touch—he always places melody before rampant virtuosity. Davis, his longtime foil, is a winning tenor and baritone saxophonist. Tuesdays are given over to the GEORGE GEE ORCHESTRA, a seventeen-piece swing band.

RAINBOW & STARS, 30 Rockefeller Plaza (632-5000)—An old-fashioned night club, sixty-five floors above it all, complete with Art Deco fixtures, intimate glitter, and a panoramic view as dizzying as the tab. LESLIE UGGAMS is the current diva-in-attendance. . . . ¶ Across the hall, in the Rainbow Room, there's a revolving dance floor, plus swinging big-band music courtesy of the Rainbow Room Orchestra, featuring vocalists Michael Andrew and Claudette Sierra. Closed Mondays.

SWEET BASIL, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—The worthiest guitarist to emerge from the seventies swarm, JOHN SCOFIELD (in through March 26) knows how to write a great melody *and* assemble a band. He favors tricky, asymmetrical lines over generic flash; where his peers tend to be marathon runners, Scofield is an ambler. The key to his appeal is simple: within this cultivated guitarist beats the heart of a twisted bluesman. Percussionist-trumpeter JERRY GONZALEZ begins a weeklong engagement on March 28. An electrified big band belonging to trumpeter MILES EVANS is in action on Mondays. Dining.

TAVERN ON THE GREEN, Central Park W. at 67th St. (873-3200)—March belongs to cabaret stylist NANCY LA MOTT. Dining.

VILLAGE VANGUARD, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through March 26: the JOSHUA REDMAN quartet. Although the recording industry is behind Redman in a big way, the critical jury on this young tenor saxophonist is still out: he's bursting with energy and talent, but his material still isn't quite what it should be. CECIL TAYLOR drops by for a week, starting on March 28. The VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA holds sway on Mondays.

VISIONES, 125 Macdougal St., at W. 3rd St. (673-5576)—Tenor saxophonist SAM NEWSOME (in on March 28), a Terence Blanchard alumnus who's made good, is one of the brighter lights on the scene. He makes each set a celebration. Dining.

WETLANDS, 161 Hudson St. (966-4225)—The FREDDIE HUBBARD quartet lights up this vast environmentally friendly club on March 27. With the GROOVE COLLECTIVE.

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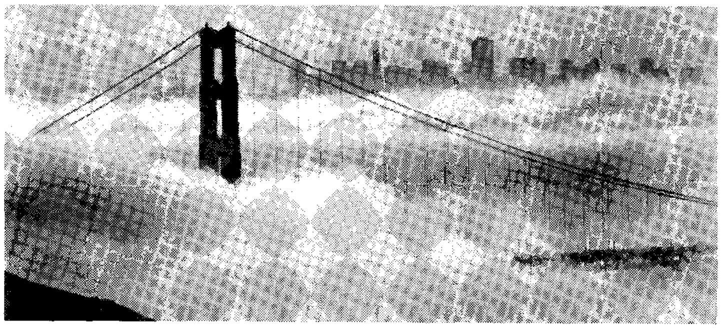

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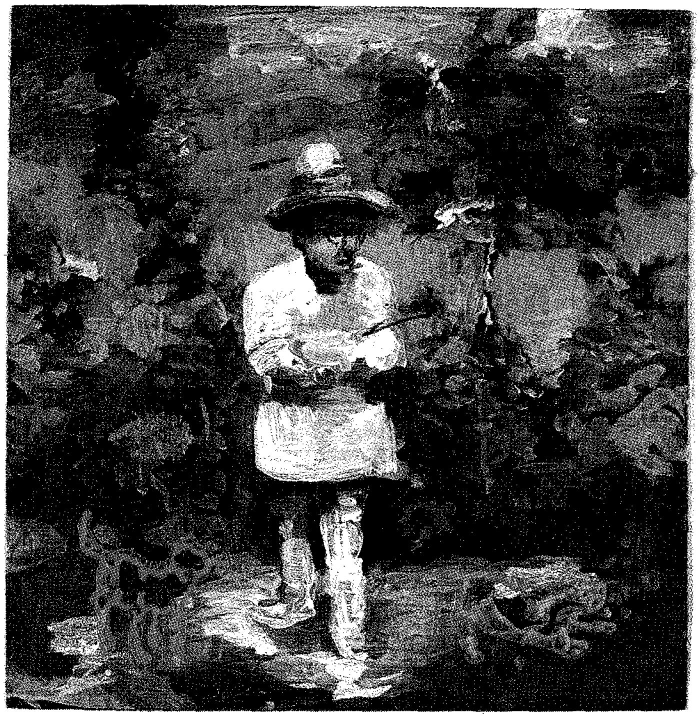
ART

Andymonium

The Whitney has just taken down a controversial show called "Black Male," but would it ever do one called "Jewish Female"? If it did, Deborah Kass would certainly applaud it. Kass has two obsessions as an artist: her identity as a Jewish lesbian, and Andy Warhol. Love him or hate him, Warhol is the silver-wigged influence that most contemporary artists have to grapple with. Rather than live in denial like some of her peers, Kass chooses to embrace her Andy anxiety, with caustically funny results. In her current show, at Jose Freire (130 Prince Street; through April 8), she has given Warhol's monumental "Ethel Scull 36 Times" (1963)—the artist's homage to one of his early (and Jewish) supporters—an up-to-the-minute revision, in "Alice Kosmin 36 Times." Kass's humor can be blunt and even a little cheap, but it packs a punch: her womanly response to "Empire" (1964), Warhol's eight-hour single-shot movie of the Empire State Building, is "Tunnel," an unblinking sixty-minute video gaze into the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel.



Self-portrait by Leslie Lerner (Rosenberg + Kaufman).

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St.—"R. B. Kitaj," a retrospective of more than seventy paintings by the American expatriate who for nearly four decades has lived and worked in London. Through May 14. . . . ¶ "I Tell My Heart: The Art of Horace Pippin," a selection of paintings by a self-taught black artist from Pennsylvania (1888-1946). . . . ¶ "Greek Gold." Forget embarrassment—this is a *humiliation* of riches, as splendid an exhibition of Classical jewelry as we're ever likely to see. The workmanship throughout is so delicate that you may want to bring a magnifying glass. Through March 26. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:15, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St.—A retrospective of video installations, sculptural objects, walk-in environments, and sound pieces by Bruce Nauman. (Reviewed in this issue.) Through May 23. . . . ¶ "Kandinsky: Compositions." Through April 25. . . . ¶ A selection of drawings from the sixties by such sculptors as Eva Hesse, Robert Smithson, Dan Flavin, Kenneth Snelson, and Sol LeWitt. . . . ¶ Recent photographic acquisitions, including works by Rudy Burckhardt, Hans Bellmer, Jan Groover, Gilles Peress, and Mariana Yampolsky. Through April 11. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, 11 to 6; Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 8:30.)

Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St.—A Ross Bleckner retrospective treats us to liberal helpings of the painter's familiar stew of sublimity and kitsch—the work of a soul profoundly divided between the raptures of a mystic and the whimsies of an interior decorator. Much of it is sickly gorgeous; some of it betrays a deep spiritual longing. Through May 14. . . . ¶ A ten-year survey of the work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres. This Cuban-born Neo-Concepualist supplements his typically sparse or abstract imagery (stacks of paper, sometimes bearing cryptic messages; spills of hard candies and of bubble gum) with parenthetical subtitles that allude to AIDS, politics, and more personal themes. Through May 10. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 6, and Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 8.)

Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Ave. at 75th St.—The 1995 Biennial. The fourth and third floors are already open; the second floor opens March 23. (Open Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

American Museum of Natural History, Central Park W. at 79th St.—"Spiders!" Are you ready for this arachnorama? Twelve live tarantulas are at the center of the web. You can also get caught up in anatomical diagrams, habitat dioramas (who knew?), exoskeleton models, and courtship videos (yecch). (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Brooklyn Museum, Eastern Parkway—The greatly expanded African galleries have reopened, and they now contain more than two hundred and fifty works. . . . ¶ "Thomas Cole: Landscape into History" presents arcadian and allegorical visions of New World wilderness by the English-born founder of the Hudson River school. Through April 2. . . . ¶ "Grand Reserves" gives museumgoers a chance to see eleven recently restored and reframed paintings from the museum's storerooms, including works by William Merritt Chase, Louis Remy Mignot, Arthur B. Davies, and others. Through March 26. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

Cooper-Hewitt Museum, Fifth Ave. at 91st St.—Books, catalogues, signs, and stationery, mostly from the fifties and sixties, by the graphic designer Elaine Lustig Cohen. Through May 23. (Open Tuesdays, 10 to 9, with no admission charge after 5; Wednesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 5; Sundays, noon to 5.)

Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St.—"Romantics, Neoclassicists, Realists: European Drawings from the Stanford University Museum of Art" includes works from the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by Fragonard, Turner, Delacroix, Fuseli, and others. Through May 14. (Open daily, except Mondays, 10 to 6; Sundays, 1 to 6.)

Japan Society, 333 E. 47th St.—The enchanting dolls on display in "Ningyô: The Art of the Human Figurine" are rendered with exquisite precision and charm. (One has thirty-two wigs, each with a different name.) Nineteenth-century Japanese girls played with court ladies, dancers, musicians, and empresses; boys had samurai warriors. Ningyô are more than toys, though: they have been used to heal the sick, bestow fertility, and (more recently) to boost examination scores. Through April 2. (Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 5.)

Jewish Museum, Fifth Ave. at 92nd St.—"Camille Pissarro: Impressionist Innovator" includes many of the artist's landscapes, figure paintings, family portraits, and Japonism-inspired design experiments. (Open Sundays through Thursdays, 11 to 5:45; Tuesday evenings until 8.)

Morgan Library, 29 E. 36th St.—"The Painted Page: Italian Renaissance Book Illumination, 1450-1550" demonstrates that Renaissance artists expressed themselves just as exuberantly in illuminated manuscripts as they did in painting and sculpture. Every item on display is superb. A map of Italy in Ptolemy's "Geography" has the coloristic bravado of an Ellsworth Kelly; the massive choir books from Milan, Lodi, and Cesena have the impressive heft of Richard Serras. Through May 7. . . . ¶ "In Praise of Aldus Manutius: A Quincentenary Exhibition." A large group of books from the house of the master printer. Through April 9. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10:30 to 5; Saturdays, 10:30 to 6; Sundays, noon to 6.)

Museum of American Folk Art, Columbus Ave. at 65th St.—The art of Minnie Evans (1892-1987), often inspired by religious visions, is on view in an exhibit of more than sixty paintings. Through April 2. . . . ¶ "The Gift Is Small, The Love Is Great," a show of Pennsylvania German gift frakturs (illuminated documents). Through April 2. (Open daily, except Mondays, 11:30 to 7:30.)

Museum of the City of New York, Fifth Ave. at 104th St.—"Curating New York: The Legacy of Grace M. Mayer" is a tribute to the museum's first curator of prints and photographs. Fifty works are on view, including photographs by Berenice Abbott and the Wurts brothers, prints by Currier and Ives, political cartoons by Rollin Kirby, and cityscapes by Reginald Marsh. . . . ¶ "A Century Apart: Images of Struggle & Spirit, Jacob Riis and Five Contemporary Photographers." (Open Wednesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 5; Sundays, 1 to 5.)

The New Museum, 583 Broadway—Fifty large-scale photographs by Andres Serrano, including examples from all of his thematic series since 1983. Through April 9. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays until 8.)

New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St.—All forty of Lawrence Weiner's artist books, along with posters, matchbooks, plates, and other objects, are gathered in the peculiarly titled "Learn to Read Art The Books: Lawrence Weiner." Through April 8. . . . ¶ An exhibition on the works of the French fabulist Jean de La Fontaine (1621-95) is in the Solomon Room. Seventeenth-century music sets the tone for the display of rare books, drawings, scores, and other objects. Through April 15. . . . ¶ "e. e. cummings @ 100: An Anniversary Exhibition." (Open Mondays, and Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6. The following lists lead off with new shows.)

Andy Goldsworthy—Two installations: a cone of green Vermont slate, and a group of rocks from Scotland with natural indentations that hold pools of red water. Also on view are large color photographs of other works made in Scotland. Opens March 24. Through April 22. (Galerie Lelong, 20 W. 57th St.)

Sidney Goodman—New charcoals, pastels, and watercolors by an exceptional veteran draftsman. Opens March 23. Through April 29. (Dintenfass, 50 W. 57th St.)

Joel Shapiro—Recent drawings and painted-wood sculptures. Opens March 24. Through April 22. (Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St.)

•

Joe Andoe—These seven monumental paintings of horses, by an Oklahoma artist, have the hyperreal impact of early photography. The gray-and-umber palette creates a spooky, twilit realm of phosphorescence and gives the horses the quiet dignity of Velazquez' royal sitters—all of which makes the final canvas, painted in a blinding shade of lipstick red, a retinal shock. Through April 15. (Blum Helman, 20 W. 57th St.)

Peter Cain—Two paintings, two manipulated photos, and several drawings that continue this young artist's slice-and-reassemble treatment of auto imagery. Through April 25. (Marks, 1018 Madison Ave., at 79th St.)

Jacob El Hanani—At first glance, these ink drawings appear to be neat squares of a uniform gray. A closer look reveals zillions of tiny pen strokes: triangles, circles, cross-hatching, even the Hebrew alphabet, written over and over. You can't help but admire the compulsive skill, but bring your glasses. Through April 1. (Yoshii, 20 W. 57th St.)

Paul Jenkins—New paintings that combine his familiar poured pigments with an earlier staining technique and a recent impasto style. Through April 8. (Associated American Artists, 20 W. 57th St.)

Gwen John (1876-1939)—Drawings, watercolors, and an oil from the artist's estate, on view for the first time. Included are a portrait of Rodin, with whom she had a ten-year love affair, and several watercolors of cats. Through April 1. (Davis & Langdale, 231 E. 60th St.)

Wolf Kahn—Recent landscapes, familiar enough, but vibrantly rendered in an unusual, bright palette. Through April 5. (Borgenicht, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.)

Alex Katz—Small landscapes and portraits of women, some in oil on masonite and some in pencil on paper. Through April 1. (Marlborough, 40 W. 57th St. Open Mondays.)

Robert Kushner—Many of these new paintings of flowers, fruits, and vegetables are quite beautiful, but they're also frankly and unapologetically a little tacky. Through April 8. (Midtown-Payson, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.)

David Smith (1906-65)—Oil paintings by an artist in the process of becoming a great sculptor—clunky, but with a certain naïve charm. The Surrealist influences are not very well digested: the giant bird in "Home of the Welder" has clumped gracelessly out of Chagall, and the droopy figures littering the foreground of "Piat" (an homage to the cellist Gregor Piatigorsky) are an embarrassingly direct quote from Dali. But the "portrait" of the Budapest String Quartet—in which four music stands bop to the beat, like something from a lost scene in "Fantasia"—is a delight. Through March 25. (Washburn, 20 W. 57th St.)

"Alternative Visions II"—An interesting concept, which almost works: fourth- and third-century B.C. Greek vases from southern Italy juxtaposed with drawings by modern masters. The Classical influences on a late, pornographic Picasso are obvious; more subtle is the way a Matisse charcoal of grape leaves echoes the shapely dignity of a bronze pitcher. But drawings by Franz Kline and David Smith seem to have been included simply because they're bold, black, and for sale. Through April 1. (Mathes, 41 E. 57th St.)

"The City: New York Visions"—Works dating from the turn of the century to the present, among them some fascinating surprises: a modest little pencil drawing of a warehouse, by the pre-jazz Stuart Davis; a sweet view of Central Park in the snow, by Edward Stieglitz, the photographer's father; a glistening, hard-edged " 'New York' Still Life," by Tamara de Lempicka. Many of the biggest names in American figurative art are represented by strong work, and there is a generous budget of superrealism. Richard Estes' view of lower Manhattan from the Staten Island ferry is as bracing as a sea breeze blowing across the harbor. Through April 1. (ACA, 41 E. 57th St.)

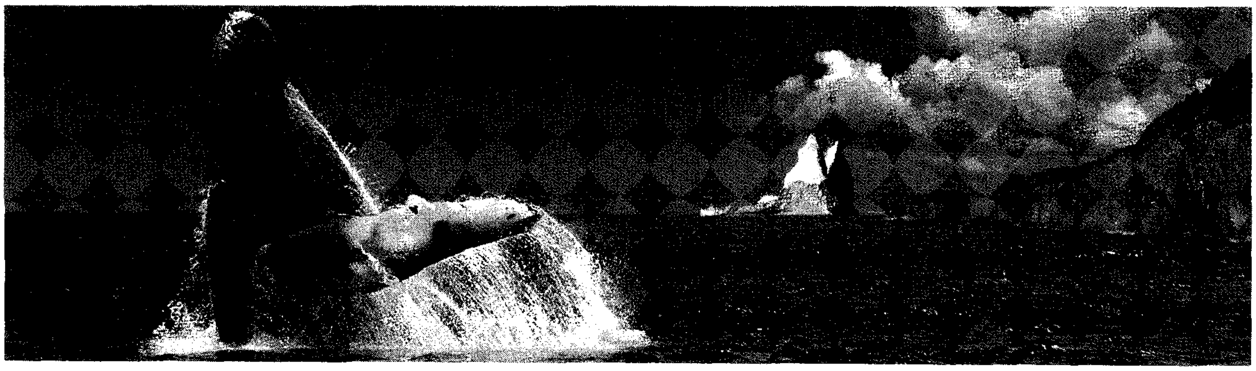
"Conspiratorial Laughter"—The friendship of Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray is among the most famous in the history of art, and this well-chosen exhibition comprises many of their best collaborations. More than a dozen of Ray's portraits of Duchamp are on view, including a hilarious shot of the great man wearing a headdress of Turkish coins (purportedly for his initiation into a society devoted to the memory of Alfred Jarry). There is also a photograph of the two artists by Cartier-Bresson. Through April 15. (Zabriskie, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.)

"Elementum"—All four *elementa*, actually, in paintings by Jennifer Bartlett, Howard Hodgkin, April Gornik, Michelle Stuart, and others. Through April 1. (Ryan, 24 W. 57th St.)

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Jessica Stockholder—Assemblage sculptures made with laundry bins, pillows, light bulbs, yarn, and other homely materials. Opens

The humpback of Notre Dame.



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ART–Cont'd

March 25. Through April 29. (Gorney, 100 Greene St.)

Thomas Woodruff—"The Secret Charts," a new series of paintings labelled "Figure A" to "Figure Z," that are complex, theatrically rendered amalgams of sources ranging from Warner Bros. cartoons to Victorian mourning jewelry. Opens March 23. Through April 22. (P.P.O.W, 532 Broadway.)

"ME"—A self-obsessed smorgasbord of paintings, photographs, and drawings by Chuck Close, Alan Belcher, Tina Barney, Sally Mann, Hannah Wilke, Sean Mellyn, and others. Opens March 25. Through May 6. (Arstark, 568 Broadway.)

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Jennifer Bolande—Sculptures and recent photographs. In "Aerial Phonograph," a record spins slowly on a turntable; in place of a center label is a photograph of a circle of sky divers falling through the air. Through March 25. (Gibson, 568 Broadway.)

Leslie Lerner—Narrative paintings in acrylic, tempera, and various varnishes, from a series titled "My Life in France." Through April 15. (Rosenberg + Kaufman, 115 Wooster St.)

Sol LeWitt—Re-created wall drawings from 1970-71. Through April 15. (Markey, 55 Vandam St. Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 to 2.)

Charles Long and Stereolab—In "The Amorphous Body Study Center," a terrific collaborative installation, Long's blobby sculptures—executed in rubber, plastic, glazed ceramic, and modelling clay—have been outfitted with sound equipment and headphones piping in ambient music by the avant-pop band Stereolab. Tune in, space out, enjoy. Through March 25. (Bonakdar, 130 Prince St.)

Sarah Lucas—Paintings and sculptural assemblages by the young, raunchy, abfab Brit. Through April 1. (Gladstone, 99 Greene St.)

Mary Lucier—"Last Rites (Positano)," an interactive sound-and-video-based installation about the life of the artist's mother, Margaret Glosser. Through April 22. (Lennon, Weinberg, 580 Broadway.)

Paul McCarthy—McCarthy's installation isn't really about his forty-minute video, "Pinocchio Pipenose Householddilemma"—it's about the ridiculous, nay, repulsive yellow-and-red getups, complete with jumbo shoes and tube-nosed masks, that gallerygoers who want to see it are required to don. ("The videotape . . . CANNOT be viewed unless the viewer is wearing the entire Pinocchio costume," a stern note warns.) Those who submit and pass beyond the velvet curtain are treated to the spectacle of some long-nosed liar-boys up to nasty business—much of it involving mess-making with food—which is, alternately, stupidly funny and stupefyingly dull. Through March 25. (Luhring Augustine, 130 Prince St.)

Kenneth Noland—A selection of paintings by one of the stars of color-field abstraction. The show includes two beautiful examples from the "Target" series of the early sixties but leans rather heavily on less inspired recent work. Through March 25. (Castelli, 420 West Broadway.)

Tom Otterness—A series of large metal sculptures in which the artist transforms the proverbial ball and chain into oversize body parts and miniature figures, as in "Chained Foot and Leg" and "Hanging Eye." The three-dimensional works have a graceful weight, but the strident lines of the accompanying drawings have a nervous energy. Through March 25. (Brooke Alexander, 59 Wooster St.)

Frank Stella—New two-dimensional paintings that appear to be in shallow relief. Through April 15. (Gagosian, 136 Wooster St.)

Richard Tuttle—Eight wall sculptures made of cloth, Styrofoam, and wood, which address the concept of whiteness. Through April 29. (Boone, 417 West Broadway.)

Robert Whitman—Six new installations that employ water, video projections, and various objects. In one piece, images of falling objects are projected onto sheets of falling black water. Through April 15. (Pace Wildenstein, 142 Greene St.)

John Zinsser—Using two colors per work, the artist takes his continuing dialogue with sixties color-field abstraction in two different directions. At times he revels in the materiality of the paint: in "Silent Years," the thick white resembles plaster or taffy on a mustard-yellow background. In other, larger works with glossy surfaces, he explores the paint's capacity for near-transparency: pale yellow shapes swim under a blood-red wash in "Stationary Travel"; yellowy shadows lurk in the underwater blue of "Finn's Knockout." Through March 25. (Stark, 594 Broadway.)

Andrea Zittel—"Platform Bed" and "Pit Bed," furniture sculptures by a young artist intent on making practical art. Her previous works were coldly Bauhausian; now she has taken a psychedelic-sixties turn. Through April 8. (Rosen, 130 Prince St.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Asian Arts Alert—At Sotheby's, a week of Asian-art auctions: On March 21, Chinese paintings and rare books. . . . On March 22, a wide-ranging sale of Chinese decorative art. . . . On March 23, Indian and Southeast Asian works, including an extensive collection of Tibetan paintings from the thirteenth century through the fifteenth. . . . On March 24, Korean art (mostly ceramics) and a wide array of Japanese pieces. . . . On March 25, an "arcade auction" of modestly priced Asian works. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.) . . . ¶ At Christie's, auctions of Chinese paintings (on March 22) and decorative arts (March 23). On March 24, Christie's conducts its first auction since 1990 of Indian, Himalayan, Southeast Asian, and Indonesian art, including some especially striking Khmer and Tibetan Buddhist sculpture. (Park Ave. at 59th St. 546-1000.) . . . ¶ At Metropolitan Antiques, a forty-dealer show of Asian antiques and collectibles. (110 W. 19th St. March 24, from noon to 8; March 25, from 10 to 5; and March 26, from 11 to 5.)

Coliseum Antiques Show—Garden items will be prominent among the offerings of the two hundred and fifty dealers participating in this year's show. (Columbus Circle, Broadway at 59th St. March 25, from 10 to 7, and March 26, from 11 to 6. Tickets at the door on the days of the show.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

Bernd and Hilla Becher—"Industrial Facades," a new series of six-part works, in the clinical, detached manner characteristic of the artists. Through April 15. (Sonnabend, 420 West Broadway.)

Lois Conner—"Indochine: Temples & Towns," a collection of landscapes—ruins, gates, ponds, construction sites—in Vietnam and Cambodia. The seven-by-seventeen-inch platinum contact prints exhibit a startling tonal range and a richness of detail reminiscent of nineteenth-century photography. Only the chaotic electric wires in the multi-panel views of street corners date the photographs as contemporary. Through April 15. (Laurence Miller, 138 Spring St.)

Lynn Davis—Twenty years' worth of landscape, architectural, and nude studies. Through May 13. (Houk Friedman, 851 Madison Ave., at 70th St.)

Nan Goldin—The artist's reworked "Ballad of Sexual Dependency" (1982), a forty-five-minute color-slide-with-soundtrack presentation, is being screened three times a day, at 1, 3, and 5. Through April 16. (Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. Open Thursdays through Sundays, noon to 6.)

Dorothea Lange (1895-1965)—"American Photographs," a selection of works from throughout the artist's career. Through April 30. (International Center of Photography, 1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

Danny Lyon—A large-scale exhibition representing many phases of a diverse career, from his photographs of the civil-rights movement and his trademark shots of bikers, hot-rodders, and hippies to intimate photomontages of his family. The most powerful images are those done in Texas prisons in 1967-68. Through April 8. (Lowinsky, 578 Broadway.)

Floris Neusüss / Marcel Broodthaers (1924-76)—Life-size photograms from 1960 to the present, made with human figures, flowers, and found objects. / Photoworks incorporating drawing and collage, by the Belgian Conceptualist. Through April 29. (Sander, 19 E. 76th St.)

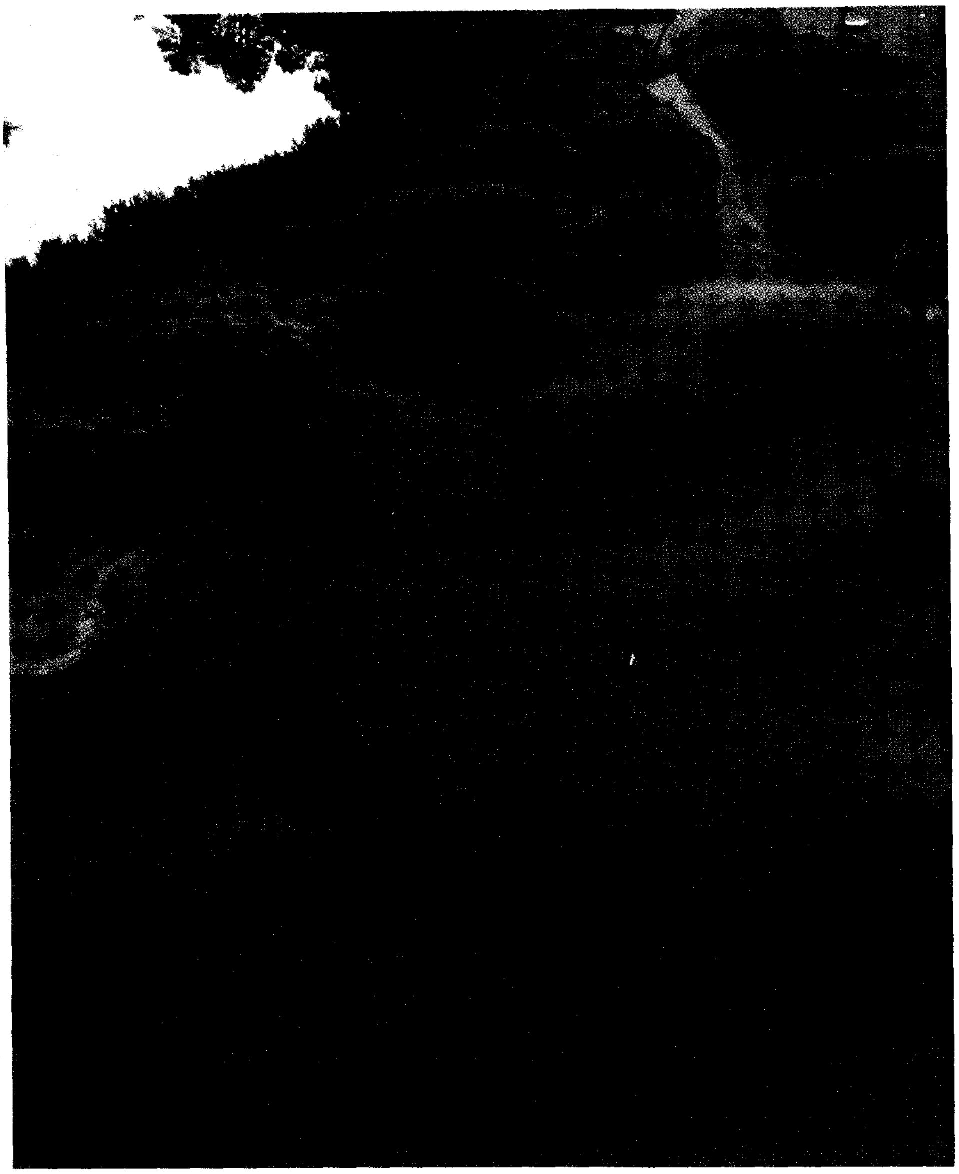
Victor Schrager / Jungjin Lee—Images of birds in classical Audubon-style arrangements. / A group of triptychs with desert and body imagery, in which an emulsion has been applied by hand to rice paper. Through March 25. (Pace-MacGill, 32 E. 57th St.)

Maggie Steber and **Alex Webb**—Two separate groups of photographs taken in Haiti: Steber's are primarily from 1994, Webb's from 1986-88. Through April 5. (Leica, 670 Broadway. Opens Saturdays at noon.)

(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art and the New Museum.)

ERNESTO BAZAN

Visitors submitting to the demands of the Paul McCarthy show, at Luhring Augustine.



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CLASSICAL MUSIC

All in Due Time

THE piano repertoire is so vast that pianists have to figure out how to make a dent in it. Most of them go at it willy-nilly—a Bach partita here, a Chopin ballade there. Not so András Schiff: his modus operandi has been to gobble up some composers whole, to the near-exclusion of others. Through the past two decades his programs have charted his successive fascinations with Mozart, Haydn, Schubert, Reger, and Janáček. He's always kept reams of Bach and Bartók (another Hungarian) under his fingers, and he'll play works by both at Carnegie Hall, on March 24. But the real news is the recital's third "B"—Beethoven, whose sonatas he hasn't essayed until now. "That doesn't mean I didn't feel close to Beethoven," Schiff insists. "I have delayed out of respect and reverence. One has to study his sonatas at a young age, but then wait patiently before performing them in public, because they are almost metaphysical—visionary—in their concerns."

The pianist isn't entering his Beethoven phase by the back door. The first sonata he's programming is the mammoth "Hammerklavier," which poses gargantuan challenges in both technique and interpretation. "In the 'Hammerklavier,' Beethoven wanted to make the pianist sweat," Schiff says. "He predicted that even fifty years after he wrote it, pianists would still dread playing it. But he was wrong. It's now much longer than fifty years."

(The box-office number for the Metropolitan Opera House is 362-6000; for Avery Fisher Hall, 875-5030; for Carnegie Hall and Weill Recital Hall, 247-7800; and for Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St., 362-8719.)

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA—**TOSCA**, with Elizabeth Holleque, Luciano Pavarotti, and Juan Pons; conducted by Daniel Oren. (March 22 and March 25 at 8.) . . . **PELLÉAS ET MÉLISANDE**, in the opening performances of a new production, with Frederica von Stade, Marilyn Horne, Dwayne Croft, Victor Braun, and Robert Lloyd; James Levine. (March 23 and March 27 at 8.) . . . **LA TRAVIATA**, with Ainhoa Arteta, Francisco Araiza, and Mr. Pons; John Fiore. (March 24 at 8.) . . . **IDOMENEO**, with Carol Vaness, Dawn Upshaw, Anne Sofie von Otter, Plácido Domingo, and Ryland Davies; Mr. Levine. (March 25 at 1:30.) . . . **MADAMA BUTTERFLY**, with Diana Soviero, Yun Deng, Michael Sylvester, and Richard Stilwell; Plácido Domingo. (March 28 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA—**LE NOZZE DI FIGARO**. (March 22 at 8.) . . . **LA RONDINE**. (March 23 at 8.) . . . **CARMEN**. (March 24 at 8.) . . . **MADAMA BUTTERFLY**. (March 25 at 1:30.) . . . **LA TRAVIATA**. (March 25 and March 28 at 8.) . . . **THE MERRY WIDOW**. (March 26 at 1:30.) (New York State Theatre. 870-5570.)

NEW YORK GRAND OPERA COMPANY—Vincent La Selva oversees a free concert of arias and ensembles from French and Italian operas. (Citicorp Center Atrium, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. March 23 at 5:30.)

AMATO OPERA COMPANY—The company's current offering is "Andrea Chénier." (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 228-8200. March 24-25 at 7:30.)

LES ARTS FLORISSANTS—The French early-music ensemble offers concert versions of two secular entertainments by Marc-Antoine Charpentier, "La Descente d'Orphée aux Enfers" and "Les Plaisirs de Versailles." William Christie directs. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 1-718 636-4100. March 28 at 7.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC—Colin Davis conducts an all-Sibelius program comprising the tone poem "En Saga," the "Karelia" Suite, and the Symphonies No. 6 and No. 7. (Avery Fisher Hall. March 23-25 at 8.) . . . ¶ On March 26, from 2:30 to 5, the orchestra launches a weeklong exploration of the choral music of Brahms with a symposium in which music director Kurt Masur joins a panel of scholars to discuss the choral tradition in nineteenth-century Germany. At 7, Joseph Flummerfelt will direct the Westminster Symphonic Choir in an all-Brahms program that includes the motet "O Heiland, reiss die Himmel auf," selections from the "Deutsche Volkslieder," and excerpts from the "Liebeslieder-Walzer" (in which Glenn Parker and Nancianne Parrella will play the duo-piano accompaniment). (Ethical Culture Society, 2 W. 64th St. No tickets are necessary for the symposium. Concert admission is free to those with tickets for the Philharmonic's upcoming Brahms concerts, on March 29-April 1; others should call 874-5454 for ticket information.)

CONCERT ROYAL—Presenting music by Lully: two *petits motets* and excerpts from his stage works "Armide" and "Acis et Galatée." James Richman conducts the period-instrument players, chorus, and soloists Amanda Balestrieri and Rita Lilly (sopranos), Karen Clark (mezzo-soprano), and Philip Cutlip (bass-baritone). (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 355-6160. March 24 at 8.)

ORCHESTRA OF ST. LUKE'S—André Previn conducts Mozart's Symphony No. 38 (the "Prague") and D-Minor Piano Concerto (with Alicia de Larrocha), as well as Haydn's Symphony No. 102. (Carnegie Hall. March 25 at 8.)

CROSSTOWN ENSEMBLE—Eric Grunin conducts Xenakis's "À l'Île de Gorée" (a harpsichord concerto, here featuring Christopher Oldfather), the première of a work by Nick Didkovsky, and music by Frank Zappa, Conlon Nancarrow, and Mark Steven Brooks. (Tribeca Hall, 111 Franklin St. March 25 at 8. For information about tickets, call 966-0300.)

NEW YORK CHAMBER SYMPHONY—Gerard Schwarz conducts Wagner's "Siegfried Idyll," Kodály's "Dances of Galánta," selections from Bright Sheng's opera "The Song of Majnun" (featuring soprano Kathryn Gamberoni and tenor Jon Garrison), and Bruch's Violin Concerto No. 1 (with Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg). (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. March 25 at 8 and March 26 at 3.)

CITY ISLAND BAROQUE ENSEMBLE—Violist Ori Kam and cellist Zvi Plesser are featured in concertos by Telemann, Vivaldi, and Marcello. (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., City Island, the Bronx. 1-718 885-2478. March 26 at noon.)

CENTRAL CITY CHORUS—Performing Brahms' "Ein Deutsches Requiem," using the composer's two-piano reduction of his orchestral score; with soprano Deborah Stephens and baritone Jack Eppler. Charles Pilling directs. (Central Presbyterian Church, Park Ave. at 64th St. March 26 at 7. Tickets at the door on the night of the concert.)

DESSOFF CHOIRS—Amy Kaiser oversees an evening of Romantic songs and choral music, by Schubert, Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, Robert and Clara Schumann, Wolf, and Reger. (Merkin Concert Hall. March 26 at 8.)

NEW YORK CITY GAY MEN'S CHORUS—The choir shares the stage with an array of opera and recital stars: sopranos Constance Hauman, Roberta Peters, and Benita Valente; mezzo-sopranos Emily Golden and Frederica von Stade; tenor Jerry Hadley; and baritones Kurt Ollmann and Arthur Woodley. Gary Miller directs. (Carnegie Hall. March 26 at 8.)

NEW ENGLAND SYMPHONIC ENSEMBLE—John Rutter directs the youth orchestra and a choir in Haydn's "The Creation." (Carnegie Hall. March 27 at 8.)

RECITALS

ABBEY SIMON—The pianist offers Schumann's "Abegg" Variations, two of Busoni's Bach arrangements, Brahms' F-Minor Sonata, and Liszt's Six "Paganini" Études. (Carnegie Hall. March 22 at 8.)

ANTON KUERTI—Performing the first piano sonatas of Beethoven, Czerny, and Schumann. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. March 22 at 8.)

NEW YORK WOODWIND QUINTET—Playing quintets by Nielsen, Carter, and Wallingford Riegger, as well as an arrangement of Dvořák's F-Major String Quartet (the "American"). (Paul Hall, Juilliard School, 60 Lincoln Center Plaza. March 22 at 8. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 769-7406.)

NEW YORK PHILOMUSICA CHAMBER ENSEMBLE—Performing John Harbison's Schubert-inspired piano quartet "November 19, 1828, A Hallucination in 4 Movements," as well as songs with obbligato clarinet, by Spohr and Schubert (with soprano Barbara Ann Martin and clarinettist David Krakauer), and Fauré's G-Minor Piano Quartet. (Merkin Concert Hall. March 22 at 8.)

ERICK FREULON—In his New York-début recital, the French baritone sings music by Schubert, Wolf, Fauré, Schoenberg, and Ravel; with pianist Raphaël Rochet. (Weill Recital Hall. March 22 at 8.)

NEW MUSIC CONSORT—March 22 at 8: Recent works by Anne LeBaron, Joan Tower, Jennifer Higdon, and Kathryn Alexander. (Borden Auditorium, Manhattan School of Music, Broadway at 122nd St.) . . . ¶ March 24 at 8: Music for stringed instruments, by Xenakis, Carter, Salvatore Sciarrino, Belinda Reynolds, and Steve Reich. (Christ and St. Stephen's Church, 120 W. 69th St. For information about tickets to either concert, call 362-0962.)

BARGEMUSIC—Violinist Mark Peskanov, violist Toby Hoffman, and cellist Fred Sherry perform trios by Schubert (in B-Flat Major), Beethoven, and Dohnányi (his Serenade in C Major, Op. 10). (Fulton Ferry Landing,

GERARD NICOLAS

Brooklyn. 1-718 624-4061. March 23 at 7:30 and March 26 at 4.)

New Jersey Percussion Ensemble—Offering music from the early and mid-twentieth century, by Cowell, Varèse, Chávez, David Olan, Alex Bocchino, Robert Pollock, and Arthur Kreiger. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. March 23 at 8.)

University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music—At Merkin Concert Hall, concerts featuring the conservatory's faculty and students. March 23 at 8: Schumann's Andante and Variations for two pianos, two cellos, and French horn; Gerhard Samuel's String Quartet No. 2; and Brahms' Piano Quintet. . . . ¶ March 26 at 3: Septets by Beethoven and Hummel, as well as Corigliano's "Poem in October."

Menahem Pressler and the New York Chamber Soloists—In a brief concert, the pianist and the instrumental ensemble offer a reduced orchestration of Mozart's A-Major Piano Concerto (K. 414). (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. March 24 at 7. . . . **Note:** The performance will be repeated as a children's concert on March 25 at 2:30.)

András Schiff—The pianist performs Bach's Four Duets (from volume three of the "Klavierübung") and "Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue"; Bartók's "Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm" (from volume six of "Mikrokosmos"), Suite (Op. 14), and Sonata (1926); and Beethoven's B-Flat-Major Sonata (Op. 106, the "Hammerklavier"). (Carnegie Hall. March 24 at 8.)

Francophile Heaven—A marathon concert in which a succession of musicians plays the works of Debussy and Ravel (with related films, dances, and readings interspersed). Performers include pianists Gilbert Kalish, Claude Frank, Lilian Kallir, Charles Rosen, Ruth Laredo, and Frederic Chiu; the American and the Mendelssohn String Quartets; the Laurel Trio; and the Manhattan Chamber Orchestra (conducted by Richard Auldon Clark). (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. March 25, from 11 A.M. to midnight. No tickets are required. For detailed schedule information, call 864-1414.)

Manuel Barrueco—Classical guitarist, playing music by Bach, Takemitsu, Granados, Albéniz, Chick Corea, and Keith Jarrett. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. March 25 at 8.)

Camerata Mediterranea—Three singers from France's Deep South join several instrumentalists in a program of songs and poems by the twelfth-century troubadour Bernard de Ventadorn. (The Cloisters, Fort Tryon Park. 923-2819. March 26 at 1 and 3. . . . **Note:** Readings from a medieval biography of Ventadorn will be delivered in English at the early performance and in the original Occitan at the later one. Plan accordingly.)

Boston Composers String Quartet—Playing quartets by Mozart (in D Minor, K. 421), Arthur Foote (in G Minor), David L. Post (the première of his First), and William Thomas McKinley (his Ninth). (Weill Recital Hall. March 26 at 2.)

Mstislav Rostropovich—The cellist performs Bach's unaccompanied Suite in C Minor, and is assisted by pianist Lambert Orkis in sonatas by Strauss and Debussy, and in Schnittke's "Epilogue." (Avery Fisher Hall. March 26 at 3.)

Women's Works—A program of music by Louise Farrenc, Jane Potoker Fink, Mary Howe, Ursula Mamlok, Mira J. Spektor, Joyce Suskind, and Ann McMillan; with the Aviva Players and the Andreas Trio, among other performers. (Kosciuszko Foundation, 15 E. 65th St. March 26 at 4. For information about tickets, call 362-2277.)

Wolfram Koessel and Thomas Sauer—Cellist and pianist, performing works by Britten, Beethoven, and others. (Hotel Wales, Madison Ave. at 92nd St. March 26 at 6 and 8. No tickets necessary.)

Moscow Conservatory Trio—The ensemble's concert comprises piano trios by Rachmaninoff and Brahms (in B Major). (Merkin Concert Hall. March 27 at 7.)

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CLASSICAL MUSIC–Cont'd

Piano and Winds—The first of three chamber-music concerts in which pianist András Schiff will collaborate with eminent wind players. This opening installment includes unaccompanied oboe solos by Berio and Carter, Berg's "Four Pieces" (for clarinet and piano), György Kurtág's "Pieces for Piano, Four-hands," Carter's *Piano and Winds Quintet*, and several works by Bach. In addition to Mr. Schiff, the performers are oboist, English hornist, and duo-pianist Heinz Holliger; flutist Philippe Racine; clarinettist Elmar Schmid; bassoonist Klaus Thunemann; and French hornist Radovan Vlatkovic. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. March 28 at 8. The series will continue on March 30 and April 2.)

Sonia Rubinsky—Pianist, performing Beethoven's Six Bagatelles (Op. 126), C. P. E. Bach's Fifth "Württemberg" Sonata, the première of George Edwards' Five Études, Mendelssohn's "Variations Sérieuses," Nicolas Roslavetz' "Trois Grandes Études," and works by Villa-Lobos. Presented by the Guild of Composers. (Merkin Concert Hall. March 28 at 8.)

Artur Papazian—In addition to Chopin's Préludes (Op. 28) and Études (Op. 10 and Op. 25), the pianist performs a set of dances composed in 1906 by Gomidas. Born with the name Soghomonian, and also known among his fellow-clerics as Gomidas Vartabed (Archimandrite), the Armenian composer and ethnomusicologist was a pioneer in the writing of "classical" genre pieces based on his nation's folk models—he eschewed as far as possible the European compositional techniques he had learned during graduate study in Germany. Gomidas's career was tragically curtailed; he became incurably psychotic after witnessing the Armenian genocide of 1915, and spent his remaining twenty years in an asylum in Paris. (Carnegie Hall. March 28 at 8.)

FOR KIDS

(Accompanied by parents or other adults.)

The Circus Is Coming—Three circuses—a three-ring extravaganza and two single-ring shows (homegrown and Francophone)—hoof into town in the same week. At Madison Square Garden, the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey roar and soar with Bengal-tiger trainer Gunther Gebel-Williams, fifth-generation acrobats, a Bulgarian motorcycle trickster, Russian bounders, young Chicago tumblers on elephants, and the usual Wheel of Death. (465-6741. March 23 at 7:30; March 24 at 10:30 and 7:30; March 25 at 10:30, 2:30, and 7:30; and March 26 at 1 and 5:30. Through April 30.) . . . ¶ The Big Apple Circus comes to a borough near you this spring. This week, the troupe is romping in Queens. (Cunningham Park. March 22-24 at 11 and 7 and March 25-26 at 12:30 and 4:30. For information about tickets, call 212-268-0055.) . . . ¶ The Cirque du Soleil brings its blue-and-yellow big top to the southern tip of Manhattan, with "Alegría," its newest show. (Battery Park City. 952-1200. Preview performance on March 28 at 8. Opens March 30.)

"Kids Dance"—Students of the New Ballet School, founded by choreographer Eliot Feld to encourage talented dancers from the city's schools, take the Joyce stage with "Sleep Study," three commedia-dell'arte dances, "Excursions," "Kore," and selections from "The Jig Is Up." (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. March 25 at 2.)

"Zhang Boils the Ocean"—Zhang wants to marry the undersea dragon princess; when her father objects, Zhang boils the ocean, which not only makes a big crab soup, but also gets the father to change his mind. The Chinese Theatre Workshop brings the fairy tale to the stage with shadow play, a fifteen-foot dragon puppet, and traditional dance. (Henry Street Settlement, 466 Grand St. 598-0400. March 25 at 2.)

Jazz for Young People—Trumpeter Wynton Marsalis has been explaining the principles of jazz in a series of concert demonstrations. In this year's final installment, he and his ensemble show how themes by Duke Ellington, Thelonious Monk, and Jelly Roll Morton become the basis of improvisations. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. March 25 at 11 and 1.)

The Chinese Golden Dragon Acrobats and Magicians of Taiwan—The family of acrobats, trained in their craft since childhood, perform kung-fu derring-do and such Chinese circus tricks as "Pagoda of Chairs." (Whitman Hall, Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts, Brooklyn College. 1-718 951-4500. March 26 at 2.)

World Patrol Kids—This crew of singers aged six to eighteen performs "Kids Can Change the World," an environmentally copacetic revue. (West End Gate Children's Theatre, Broadway at 113th St. 662-8830. March 25 at 1:30.)

"The Giant Who Swallowed the Moon"—An exhibition of children's art in which the artists—from two centers of traditional Indonesian art, the royal city of Yogyakarta, in Java, and the painters' village of Ubud, in Bali—illustrate the myths and rituals of their country. The title myth explains the moon's disappearance during an eclipse; one drawing shows village children banging pots in an attempt to scare the giant and bring back the moon. (Children's Museum of Manhattan, 212 W. 83rd St. 721-1234. The exhibition continues through May.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

Prague Spring—Two events this week bring Czech literary culture to these shores. March 26 at 6:30: A reading of work from the new literary review *Trafika*, printed in English in the Czech Republic. *Trafika* (it rhymes with Kafka, and it means kiosk) publishes a familiar mix of poetry, fiction, and interviews with authors, but the writing comes from unexpected sources. In the third issue, the standout piece, "The Way Station," was the work of Do Phuoc Tien, a waiter/iceman from Danang. For the latest issue, the editors—three twenty-something Americans in Prague—have commissioned translations of work from twelve different countries to complement American contributions from John Barth, Denis Johnson, and Douglas O'Connor. At the Sunday reading, the review will present the Ukrainian poet Yuriy Tarnawsky and the New York poet Luis Cabalquinto; in addition, translator Esther Allen will read selections from the work of the Mexican poets Camila de la Mora and Roberto Tejada. (K.G.B., 85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ March 27 at 8: Czech writer Ivan Klíma reads from English translations of his darkly comic novels. After the fall of the Communist government, in 1989, the dissident author's previously banned "Love and Garbage" sold out a run of a hundred thousand copies. Philip Roth, who was visiting at the time of its publication, remarked on the phenomenon with evident longing: "During my week in Prague," he wrote in the *New York Review of Books*, "the longest lines I saw were for ice cream and for books." Perhaps Czech literary ardor has cooled slightly—Klíma's latest novel, "Waiting for the Dark, Waiting for the Light," had a more Western-style run of fifteen thousand, just the number Grove plans for the American edition. The Croatian writer Dubravka Ugrešić is also on the bill. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100.)

Women's History Month—A sampler of events. At the Bronx Museum of the Arts, an exhibition of contemporary works in the domestic arts (sewing, knitting, quilting, etc.) that explore domestic topics, like motherhood and housework. (1040 Grand Concourse. Open Wednesdays, from 3 to 9; Thursdays and Fridays, from 10 to 5; and Saturdays and Sundays, from 1 to 6.) . . . ¶ March 23 at 2: Filmmaker Doris Chase will be present at a screening of "Glass Curtain," a twenty-eight-minute video about the ties between a mother and a daughter and the strain caused by the mother's Alzheimer's disease. The film, part of Chase's series of six portraits of older women, will be used as a springboard for a discussion, led by Ms. Chase, about how the disease can intensify the emotions underlying a mother-daughter relationship. (New York Public Library, 328 E. 67th St. No tickets necessary.)

Pasta and Matzo—Hungry New Yorkers can get a taste of both sides of the Judeo-Christian tradition, at Barnes & Noble bookstores this weekend. On Saturday, Father Joseph Orsini will prepare regional Italian pasta dishes from his cookbook "Father Orsini's Pasta Perfecto." On Sunday, Ruth Kanin, who turned recipes passed down from her grandmother into the collection "Eat! Eat!," will serve Passover dishes from Central Europe. (Father Orsini visits the store at Sixth Ave. at 21st St., and Ruth Kanin calls on the one at Broadway at 82nd St. Demonstrations begin at 2. No tickets necessary.)

Readings—March 25 at 8: Twenty-five poets, including Bob Holman, Indigo, Tracie Morris, and Carolyn Peyser, simultaneously read selections from their past year's work; Butch Morris conducts the chorus of poets. (Context, 28 Avenue A. Tickets at the door on the night of the reading.) . . . ¶ March 27 at 7:30: A dramatic reading of Dorothy West's second novel, "The Wedding." Harlem Renaissance scholar Gayle Pemberton introduces the work. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 645-5848.) . . . ¶ March 28 at 6:30: Poet Li-Young Lee ("The City in Which I Love You") reads from "The Winged Seed," a memoir of his family's relocations in Indonesia and in China under Mao. (Asia Society, Park Ave. at 70th St. 517-2742.) . . . ¶ March 28 at 7: Elizabeth Macklin reads from "A Woman Kneeling in the Big City," her first book of poems. (Nicholas Roerich Museum, 319 W. 107th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ March 28 at 7: Jayne Anne Phillips reads from her latest novel, "Shelter." (Rosenthal Library, Queens College, Kissena Blvd. at the Long Island Expressway. 1-718 997-4646.) . . . ¶ March 28 at 7: Laurel Casey, June Edelstein, Elizabeth Ferber, Geraldine Gan, and Maria Stadtmueller read stories and essays in a selection of women's writing titled "From the Lyrical to the Hysterical." (West Side Y, 5 W. 63rd St. Tickets at the door on the night of the reading.) . . . ¶ March 28 at 8: Richard Howard introduces the poets Eavan Boland and Alan Shapiro, who will read from their work. (New School, 66 W. 12th St. For information about tickets, call the Academy of American Poets, at 274-0343.)

Talks—March 22 at 6: Jonathan Kuhn, the curator of the city's public monuments, talks about their maintenance and restoration. (Hudson Bar and Books, 636 Hudson St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ March 22 at 8: Walter Bernstein, who wrote the screenplay of "The Front," talks with historian Paul Buhle about entertainment blacklists and the N.E.A. (Brecht Forum, 122 W. 27th St. 242-4201.) . . . ¶ March 23 at 6:30: Historian Peter Buckley discusses the theatre district's fire laddies of the eighteen-forties, who manned the volunteer fire stations, worked in the public markets, and were regulars at the shows. (Brooklyn Historical Society, 128 Pierrepont St. For information, call 1-718 624-0890.) . . . ¶ March 23 at 6 and March 25 at 4: For a workshop on poetry in performance, Arthur Sabatini shows video clips of readings by Beat and Black Mountain poets, among others. (Poets House, 72 Spring St. For information, call 431-7920.)

Walks—March 25 at 1: Radical Walking Tours will check in to the Chelsea Hotel area for a tour. For more information, call 1-718 492-0069. . . . ¶ March 28 at 12:30: Actress Beth McGuire leads theatregoers on a journey of many stages, through the Times Square theatre district. For more information, call the Municipal Art Society at 935-3960.

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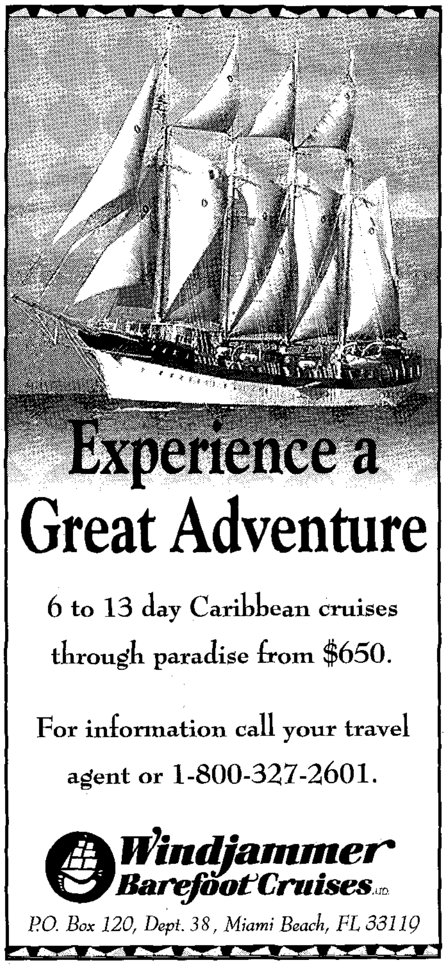

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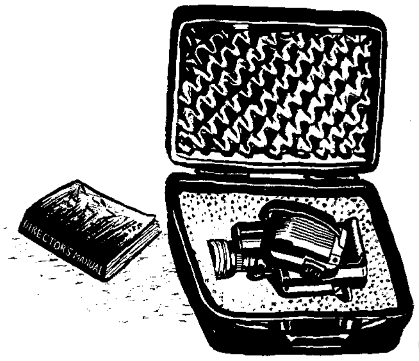


THE MOVIES

FILMS OPENING THIS WEEK

Ballet—The documentary filmmaker Frederick Wiseman spent ten weeks shooting the American Ballet Theatre in rehearsals in New York and on tour in Europe for this portrait of the company. Agnes DeMille, Irina Koplokova, David Richardson, Alessandra Ferri, Cynthia Harvey, and Susan Jaffe are among those who appear. Opening March 22. (Film Forum.)

Dolores Claiborne—Kathy Bates stars as a nurse-housekeeper in Maine accused of murdering her wealthy old boss, played by Judy Parfitt. With Jennifer Jason Leigh, David Strathairn, and Christopher Plummer. Directed by Taylor Hackford; written by Tony Gilroy, from Stephen King's 1992 novel. Opening March 24. (Village Theatre VII, 34th St. East, Coronet, Orpheum VII, Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Criterion Center.)

Funny Bones—A comedy in which a struggling comic, who is the son of a famous comic, returns to his childhood home in England to revive his career. Oliver Platt is the son, and Jerry Lewis is his successful father. With Lee Evans, Oliver Reed, George Carl, and Leslie Caron. Directed by Peter Chelsom, who co-wrote the script with Peter Flannery. Opening March 24. (Village East Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, and Lincoln Square.)

Major Payne—Damon Wayans plays an officer in charge of a group of rowdy military-school cadets, in a comedy directed by Nick Castle. Written by Wayans, Dean Lorey, and Gary Rosen, from the 1955 movie "The Private War of Major Benson," in which Charlton Heston played the officer. Opening March 24. (First & 62nd Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, Regency, and National Twin.)

Martha and I—In a small Czech town during the nineteen-thirties, a Jewish obstetrician (Michel Piccoli) marries his German housekeeper (Marianne Sägebrecht, of "Bagdad Café"), in a love story by the Czech writer-director Jiří Weiss. In German. Opening March 24. (Quad Cinema.)

Priest—Antonia Bird's portrait of a gay Roman Catholic priest in Liverpool. (Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema.) Opening March 24. (Angelika Film Center, Cinema II, Chelsea Cinemas, and Lincoln Square.)

Tall Tale: The Unbelievable Adventures of Pecos Bill—A comic Western set at the turn of the century, in which a young boy (Nick Stahl) rescues the family farm with the help of some legendary friends—Pecos Bill, Paul Bunyan, and John Henry (Patrick Swayze, Oliver Platt, and Roger Aaron Brown, respectively). Directed by Jeremiah Chechik. Written by Steven L. Bloom and Robert Rodat. Opening March 24. (Village East Cinemas, Sutton, 86th Street East, 23rd St. West Triplex, Guild, and Olympia.)

CURRENT FILMS

(The signed notes are by Whitney Balliett, Bruce Diones, Sarah Kerr, Anthony Lane, and Terrence Rafferty. If a movie has been reviewed in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given. Theatre addresses and phone numbers are listed on page 33.)

Before the Rain—A strange, confusing, and confident picture from the Macedonian director Milcho Manchevski. He has the sensibility of someone who has seen quite enough to rid him of political illusion; watching the film, you'd never guess that he's only thirty-five. The first and third parts are set in Macedonia, where a young monk (Gregoire Colin) harbors a refugee (Labina Mitevska) from the local Albanian minority. His uncle, the chunky and fearless Aleksandar (Rade Serbedzija), has come home to get some peace. Not a chance: this is a place where villages are torn in two. The middle section, a scrap of love affair set in London, is less successful, although even here the editing is so beautifully paced that Manchevski makes you sense fault lines running all over the world. He sees through hope and bigotry alike, and even when his complex rotary narrative makes no logical sense, it never stops making emotional sense. In Macedonian.—A.L. (3/13/95) (Village Theatre VII and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

The Brady Bunch Movie—There's a cardboard plot involving Michael McKean as an evil real-estate developer, but really this is a relaxed, hit-or-miss eighty-nine-minute skit. Gary Cole stands out as A Man Named Brady, a sweet optimist forever dispensing officious advice and nonsensical proverbs, but the three daughters—Christine Taylor as perfect, bitchy Marcia (updated with a lesbian admirer), Olivia Hack as lisping Cindy, and Jennifer Elise Cox as tortured Jan, the poster girl of adolescent neurosis—steal the show. Shelley Long, the most inevitable casting choice of the year, has surprisingly little to do as Carol. Directed by Betty Thomas.—S.K. (19th Street East 6, First & 62nd Cinemas, Waverly, 84th Street Sixplex, and Embassy.)

Bullets Over Broadway—A nicely structured piece of silliness from Woody Allen, set in the theatre world of the nineteen-twenties. John Cusack is the Woody substitute, an earnest young playwright who needs to discover an existence beyond the stage; Chazz Palminteri shines as the taciturn gangster who swaps places with him, becoming as ruthless in his aesthetics as he is with a gun. Around this neat switch Allen assembles a crowd of near-caricatures—opportunities for Dianne Wiest, Jim Broadbent, Jennifer Tilly, and others to show their stuff.—A.L. (10/24/94) (First & 62nd Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, Waverly, and Metro Cinema. . . . ¶ 34th St. East; through March 23.)

Bye Bye, Love—Matthew Modine, Paul Reiser, and Randy Quaid, in a comedy about three single fathers who have weekend custody of their children. Directed by Sam Weisman. Written by Gary David Goldberg and Brad Hall. (Murray Hill Cinemas, Gotham Cinema, Orpheum VII, Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, and Criterion Center.)

Candyman: Farewell to the Flesh—Tony Todd reprises his role as the hook-limbed spectre of New Orleans, who materializes to terrorize those who utter his name five times in a row. With Kelly Rowan, Timothy Carhart, Veronica Cartwright, and William O'Leary. Directed by Bill Condon. Written by Rand Ravich and Mark Kruger. (Movieland 8th Street Triplex, 19th Street East 6, 34th Street Showplace, Manhattan Twin, Orpheum VII, 84th Street Sixplex, and Astor Plaza.)

Circle of Friends—A comedy about first love, in which a plain girl—Minnie Driver, off to college in Dublin with her two best friends from home, Geraldine O'Rawe and Saffron Burrows—falls for Chris O'Donnell. Also featuring Alan Cumming and Colin Firth. Directed by Pat O'Connor. Written by Andrew Davies, from Maeve Binchy's 1990 novel. (Coronet; through March 23.)

Exotica—A mysterious search through tall grass; a strip joint where the girls weave, untouchable, in front of the customers; a pet store drowning in hot green light: yes, it's the world according to Atom Egoyan. His latest picture sidles along in the tranquillized, deadpan manner that he cultivated in "Family Viewing" and "The Adjuster." His fans believe that this style hooks into the secret, subterranean rhythms of society (if any director could do justice to Don DeLillo, it's Egoyan); the rest of us may suspect that there's less going on here than meets, and seduces, the eye. The plot is so closely woven that it verges on the incestuous. Having lost a daughter, Francis (Bruce Greenwood) finds a substitute in Christina (Mia Kirshner), a young dancer who dresses like a schoolgirl; after he runs into trouble with her, he enlists the help of a gay egg smuggler (don't ask) played by Don McKellar. The actors have to flatten their performances to match the weirdness—the occasional trill of guilt and rage feels about as spontaneous as an alarm clock. The movie is lush, enraptured, and almost no fun at all. It dances in front of us with the erotic blankness of Christina at Francis's table.—A.L. (Angelika Film Center, 68th Street Playhouse, and 84th Street Sixplex.)

Farinelli—In this historical drama directed by Gérard Corbiau, Stefano Dionisi is Carlo Broschi, one of eighteenth-century Europe's most famous castrati; Enrico Loverso appears as his composer brother Riccardo. With Jeroen Krabbé as Handel. Written by the director, Marcel Beaulieu, and Andrée Corbiau. In French. (Lincoln Square.)

Forrest Gump—As all the world now knows, Tom Hanks plays Forrest Gump, a simple Alabama soul who serves his country without hurting a fly; he saves his comrades in Vietnam, woos the dippy Jenny (Robin Wright), and runs back and forth across the continent. Hanks does his best to convince us that Gump is, in fact, a character and not merely a bulging sack of virtues, but the movie takes the fight out of him. With Sally Field and Gary Sinise. Directed by Robert Zemeckis.—A.L. (7/25/94) (Movieland 8th Street Triplex, Gemini, Chelsea Cinemas, and Columbus Circle.)

A Great Day in Harlem—A funny, moving, altogether miraculous documentary about how fifty-eight famous, near-famous, and not yet famous jazz musicians came to be photographed by Art Kane for *Esquire* in front of a brownstone on East 126th Street one morning in August of 1958. The movie, just under an hour long, is a mercurial mix of brief interviews with Kane (who died in February) and with musicians and bystanders who were at the shoot (only a dozen or so survive); alternate exposures (Kane took a hundred and twenty); various stills; an 8-mm. movie taken by Milt Hinton's wife, Mona; and sequences from the brilliant "Sound of Jazz" television special, which had aired just six months earlier and included many of the same musicians. On the same bill is Gjon Mili's classic—and pardonably arty—1944 jazz short, "Jammin' the Blues."—W.B. (Reviewed in the Jazz column, 1/23/95.) (Quad Cinema.)

Hideaway—After a car crash, Jeff Goldblum is pronounced "deader than Elvis," but a mysteriously omnipotent doctor (Alfred Molina) brings him back. The problem is that his mind is now crossed, like a bad phone connection, with that of the doctor's first rescuee—a young Satan-worshipping killer who used to be called Jeremy but has adopted the ridiculous name of Vassago. Somebody must have seen the prospect of a hit in Alicia Silverstone (the late-pubescent blonde famous for her appearance in an Aerosmith video), who plays Goldblum's daughter, screaming for help. But this movie lacks even the faintest campy delight (although Vassago, who is clearly supposed to be a stud, does call to mind a teen-age Fran Leibowitz). With Christine Lahti as Goldblum's nonplussed wife. Written by Andrew Kevin Walker and Neal Jimenez; based on the novel by Dean R. Koontz. Directed by Brett Leonard.—S.K. (Movieland 8th Street Triplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Orpheum VII, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, and Criterion Center.)

I Am Cuba—Mikhail Kalatozov's 1964 propaganda epic, just now getting its American theatrical première, is an amazing artifact. The director and his cinematographer, Sergei Urusevsky, bombard the audience with one deliriously inventive shot after another: black-and-white compositions that are dense, angular marvels of visual architecture; long tracking shots that seem to defy gravity (and reason). The screenplay, by Yevgeny Yevtushenko and Enrique Pineda Barnet, consists of four folk tales from the bad old days of the Batista regime, linked by picturesque montages and ripe prose poetry read in voice-over. Essentially, it's a paean to Fidel Castro, and everything in it is meant to distract us from the grim reality of revolutionary Cuba. Despite the solemnity, the movie feels as silly as a Vegas illusionist's act; you gape and giggle as Kalatozov makes history disappear. In Spanish, Russian, and English.—T.R. (3/20/95) (Film Forum 3.)

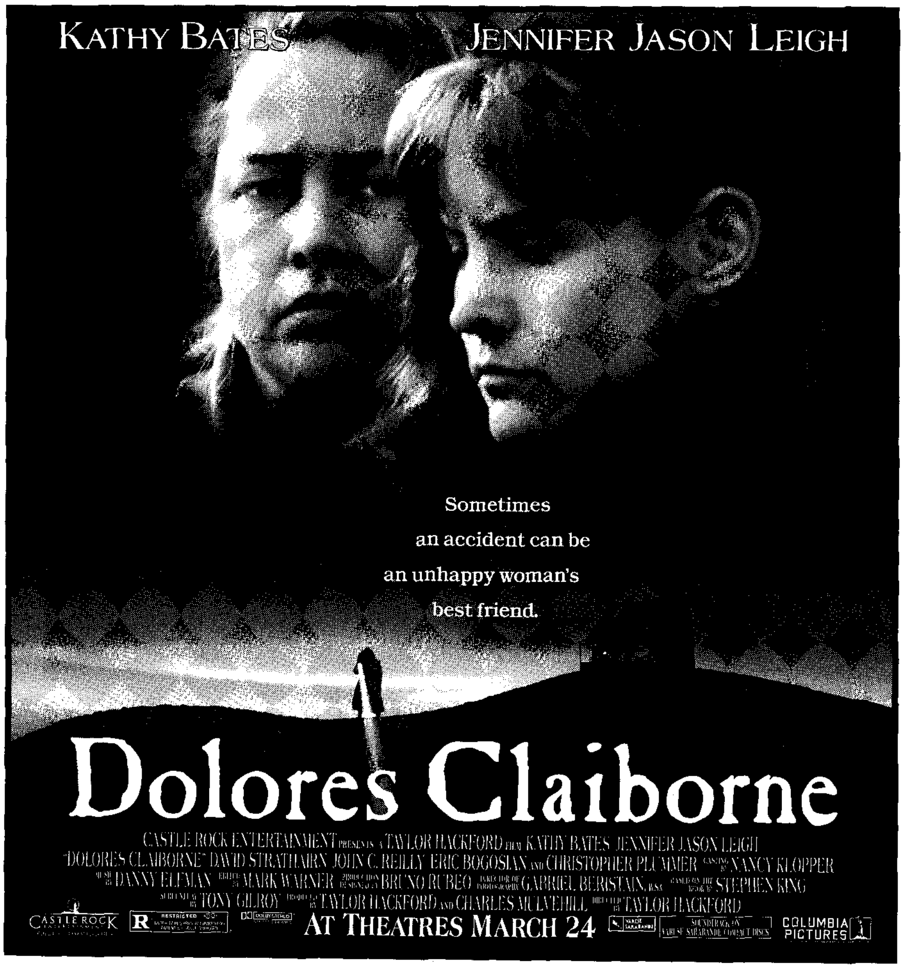
Just Cause—Sean Connery is an icy Harvard law professor and capital-punishment opponent drafted to spring Blair Underwood from death row, and Laurence Fishburne is the corrupt small-town policeman in his way. Two or three times, the actors trick you into thinking that this thriller means to grapple with white liberal guilt, but the director, Arne Glimcher, quickly chucks the dilemma they've set up. The replacement: a ridiculous racist revenge plot climaxing in an alligator-ridden swamp in the Everglades. Among the many garish stereotypes here is Ed Harris, in a cheeseball performance as a white-trash Hannibal Lecter. Screenplay by Jeb Stuart and Peter Stone, based on the novel by John Katzenbach.—S.K. (Village Theatre VII, Murray Hill Cinemas, Gemini, Orpheum VII, Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Olympia, and Criterion Center.)

Losing Isaiah—Jessica Lange plays a social worker struggling to keep possession of the boy she has adopted, and Halle Berry is the child's natural mother, who wants him back, in a drama directed by Stephen Gyllenhaal. With David Strathairn, Samuel L. Jackson, and Cuba Gooding, Jr. Written by Naomi Foner. (Village Theatre VII, 34th Street Showplace, Tower East East 85th Street, Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Embassy 1.)

The Madness of King George—Alan Bennett's stage play has moved to the screen, with the same star (Nigel Hawthorne), the same director (Nicholas Hytner), and the same story, about the King of England's decline, in the years 1788-89, from cheerful disciplinarian to lewd, unsleeping ranter. It's a fine dramatic predicament—and that's how it stays, never really pressing forward or pulling us into a plot. But there is plenty of relish here—in Ian Holm's fierce turn as a country physician, and in Hawthorne's blend of thundering and whimpers. With Helen Mirren (underused) and Rupert Everett (overweight).—A.L. (1/16/94) (Angelika Film Center, 19th Street East 6, Baronet, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Man of the House—A comedy in which Chevy Chase's advances toward Farrah Fawcett are thwarted by her eleven-year-old son (Jonathan Taylor Thomas). Directed by James Orr, who co-wrote the screenplay with Jim Cruickshank from a story by David Peckinpah and Richard Jeffries. (86th Street East Twin, 23rd St. West Triplex, Lincoln Square, and Embassy.)

Mina Tannenbaum—Writer-director Martine Dugowson's feature follows a quarter-century-long friendship between two Jewish women (Romane Bohringer and Elsa Zylberstein) in Paris. With Florence Thomassin. In French. (Quad Cinema and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)


KATHY BATES
JENNIFER JASON LEIGH
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an unhappy woman's
best friend.
Dolores Claiborne
CASTLE ROCK ENTERTAINMENT PRESENTS A TAYLOR HACKFORD FILM KATHY BATES JENNIFER JASON LEIGH
"DOLORES CLAIBORNE" DAVID STRATHAIRN JOHN C. REILLY ERIC BOGOSIAN AND CHRISTOPHER PLUMMER CASTING BY NANCY KLOPPER
MUSIC BY DANNY ELFMAN EDITED BY MARK WARNER PRODUCTION DESIGNER BRUNO RUBEO DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY GABRIEL BERISTAIN, B.S.C. BASED ON THE NOVEL BY STEPHEN KING
SCREENPLAY BY TONY GILROY PRODUCED BY TAYLOR HACKFORD AND CHARLES MULVEHILL DIRECTED BY TAYLOR HACKFORD
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CURRENT FILMS–Cont'd

Muriel's Wedding—The Australian director P. J. Hogan's début was a big hit in his native country. Toni Collette plays Muriel, the shyest member of a bored and bulbous family living in Porpoise Spit. Her only resource is old Abba tapes, her only dream to marry; the identity of the bridegroom is immaterial. Muriel's quest for contentment includes vacationing in the sun, sharing an apartment with her best friend (Rachel Griffiths), and trying on wedding dresses under false pretenses. The result is being sold as a feel-good picture in the same groove as "Strictly Ballroom," but there's a major difference: Hogan's movie doesn't feel good for long. The loud and lurid comedy, verging on caricature, soon grows bleak with bad news—divorce, cancer, suicide—none of which deepens the film; it just turns it into a downer. But the two fine, edgy performances by Collette and Griffiths keep things afloat. When they squeeze into shining satin and actually impersonate Abba, you experience both the sadness of delusion and the bliss of high camp.—A.L. (Village East Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Beekman, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

At Lincoln Square, Stefano Dionisi in "Farinelli."

ALICIA CZECHOWSKI

Naked Killer—An action film from Hong Kong about a cop (Simon Yam) on the trail of the lesbian assassins Kitty (Chingmy Yau), Princess (Carrie Ng), Baby (Kelly Yao), and Sister Cindy (Svenwara Madoka). Directed by Clarence Fok. Written by Wong Jing. In Cantonese. (Cinema Village.)

Nobody's Fool—Paul Newman plays Sully, a divorced, erratically employed construction worker in a dingy upstate New York town. Robert Benton's movie (based on a novel by Richard Russo) is essentially a series of low-key comic vignettes in which the hero tries to deal with the exasperating presence of other people: irritable neighbors, demanding friends, disappointed family members. Not much happens, but the picture bobs along amiably to the rhythm of Newman's dry, deeply funny performance, and the tiny pleasures accumulate like the snow that covers the town. The terrific supporting cast includes Bruce Willis, Melanie Griffith, Jessica Tandy, and Gene Saks.—T.R. (Movieland 8th Street Triplex, Gemini, and 23rd St. West Triplex.)

Once Were Warriors—Jake (Temuera Morrison) says he loves Beth (Rena Owen); which seems to involve getting drunk and thumping her, with frequent interludes for swearing and sex. Beth swears back with double the venom, but gradually admits to herself that it's time she took the children and got out of the house. Lee Tamahori's début picture marks the first attempt in New Zealand cinema to confront the quandaries of modern Maori life. It's a strong subject, but the film is packed so tight with the importance of its mission that it leaves all subtlety behind—it rants at the audience with the same blind fury that powers most of the characters. The relentlessness winds you up and sends you nowhere.—A.L. (Angelika Film Center and Paris.)

Outbreak—Wolfgang Petersen's biohazard thriller is a textbook example of Hollywood's ability to make something new look very old and very familiar. The screenplay, by Laurence Dworet and Robert Roy Pool (and five pricey script doctors), invents a rain-forest virus called Motaba, which migrates from Zaire and runs amok in a Northern California town. The virus is a promising villain for an apocalyptic thriller, but the filmmakers keep it contained—locked into an action-movie structure that reduces an unsettling subject to a predictable this-time-it's-personal conflict between a good-guy scientist (Dustin Hoffman) and a bad-guy general (Donald Sutherland). The movie produces a bizarre hybrid strain of suspense: it's a Hot Zone thriller with a Cold War sensibility. Also with Rene Russo, Morgan Freeman, Kevin Spacey, and Cuba Goodings, Jr.—T.R. (3/20/95) (Village Theatre VII, 19th Street East 6, 34th Street Showplace, New York Twin, Orpheum VII, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, and Criterion Center.)

Pulp Fiction—In Quentin Tarantino's celebrated picture, John Travolta, Samuel L. Jackson, Uma Thurman, Tim Roth, Harvey Keitel, Christopher Walken, and Bruce Willis parade through two and a half hours of complicated, cross-weaving Los Angeles plots, some of which are more gripping than others; the talk is dirty and funny, the violence always waiting just around the corner. It's a bright and startling picture, but the next day, it seems like a dream: the film attacks your senses and gives you almost nothing to remember it by, let alone to nourish you.—A.L. (10/10/94) (Village East Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, 86th Street East Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, 57th Street Playhouse, 84th Street Sixplex, and Embassy.)

Red—The last and best film in the trilogy that began with the baffling "Blue" and continued with the more acrid "White"; here all the skills of the director, Krzysztof Kieślowski, are brought into melancholy play. Blind chance or benign fate (according to your point of view) brings Valentine (Irène Jacob), a young model living alone in Geneva, into contact with a retired judge (Jean-Louis Trintignant) with a predilection for eavesdropping on telephone conversations. In time Valentine's repulsion shades into curiosity, and from there into affection. And the movie itself shades from coldness and contrivance into a story as touching and mysterious as anything Kieślowski has ever made. In French.—A.L. (11/28/94) (Quad Cinema. . . . ¶ Sutton; through March 23.)

Roommates—Peter Falk plays an old man living with the grandson he raised (D. B. Sweeney), who is now a married doctor with a family. With Julianne Moore and Ellen Burstyn. Directed by Peter Yates. (Village East Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Lincoln Square. . . . ¶ Cinema II and Guild; through March 23.)

The Secret of Roan Inish—John Sayles' fable about a mythological Celtic creature, the Selkie (half seal, half human), and its effect on an Irish family unfolds as a tall tale, and it offers the pleasures of a magical story told in mysterious tones. The movie begins as a rousing sea adventure, then turns into a home-and-hearth mood piece; what saves it from being cloying is an almost total lack of drama. The rhythms are placid and the camera work (by Haskell Wexler) is simple and unfussy. The film's a charm.—B.D. (Angelika Film Center, Eastside Cinema, and Lincoln Square.)

Shallow Grave—Kerry Fox, Ewan McGregor, and Christopher Eccleston are three Edinburgh roommates confronted by the corpse of their new lodger and the stash of drug money that he has left behind. They bury the body and keep the cash; greed and paranoia soon kick in; and the plot, smartly worked out by screenwriter John Hodge, marches toward its climax. Not that you care too much how it ends up or what happens to these people—the film is less a thriller than a frosty exercise in logic. But the director, Danny Boyle, does wonders with a small budget, and the suave, dense-hued look of his movie stays with you long after the horror has evaporated.—A.L. (2/13/95) (Village Theatre VII, New York Twin, and Lincoln Square.)

The Shawshank Redemption—Tim Robbins returns to his best form with his haunted, cunning portrayal of Andy Dufresne, a young banker sentenced to life imprisonment in the nineteen-forties. Frank Darabont's movie never grabs at you, preferring to work patiently on your sympathies and nerves while finding time for casual jokes. What at first seems like a plotless tale of companionship—principally between Andy and a fixer named Red (Morgan Freeman)—tightens into excitement. The picture stays on track and leaves you, appropriately enough, with a surging sense of release.—A.L. (9/26/94) (First & 62nd Cinemas, Orpheum VII, Art Greenwich Twin, and Chelsea Cinemas. . . . ¶ Regency; through March 23.)

Strawberry and Chocolate—The Cuban director Tomás Gutiérrez Alea charts the efforts of Diego (Jorge Perugorria), a gay artist, to seduce David (Vladimir Cruz), a straight and, frankly, rather boring student. It's a daring movie to have come out of Cuba, although Gutiérrez Alea's grasp of the radical temperament may seem unsophisticated to audiences here. Diego kicks out against government restrictions, David lives quietly within them; wouldn't it have been more intriguing the other way around? Co-directed by Juan Carlos Tabio. In Spanish.—A.L. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

The Sum of Us—David Stevens has adapted his play, about an Australian widower (Jack Thompson) and his gay son (Russell Crowe), for the screen. With John Polson and Deborah Kennedy. Directed by Kevin Dowling (who also directed the 1990 Off Broadway production) and Geoff Burton. (Village Theatre VII and Carnegie Hall Cinema.)

Vanya on 42nd Street—Louis Malle's astonishingly beautiful film documents a stage production, directed by André Gregory, of Chekhov's "Uncle Vanya." The conceit is that the actors—wearing street clothes and clutching take-out coffee—have gathered for a run-through; as it goes along, our sense of the theatrical reality gives way to the more intimate feeling of belief that movies create. The style of the movie seems, finally, to merge with the play itself: nothing appears to be happening, yet everything is transformed. With Wallace Shawn, as Vanya, and Julianne Moore, as Yelena; also with Brooke Smith, Larry Pine, and George Gaynes. The superb adaptation is by David Mamet.—T.R. (10/31/94) (Carnegie Hall Cinema.)

Window to Paris—Yuri Mamin's comic fantasy about St. Petersburg roommates who discover a window in their apartment that opens onto the City of Light. Written by the director and Arkadi Tigai. In Russian and French. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

THEATRE ADDRESSES

EAST SIDE

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St. (995-2000).
Little Theatre, Public Theatre, 425 Lafayette St. (598-7171).
Movieland 8th Street Triplex, 36 E. 8th (477-6600).
Village Theatre VII, 3rd Ave. at 11th (982-0400).
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th (924-3363).
Village East Cinemas, 2nd Ave. at 12th (529-6799).
19th Street East 6, B'way at 19th (260-8000).
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th (689-6548).
34th Street Showplace, 238 E. 34th (532-5544).
34th St. East, 241 E. 34th (683-0255).
Eastside Playhouse, 3rd Ave. at 55th (755-3020).
Sutton I and 2, 3rd Ave. at 57th (759-1411).
Gotham Cinema, 3rd Ave. at 58th (759-2262).
Plaza, 42 E. 58th (355-3320).
Manhattan Twin, 3rd Ave. at 59th (935-6420).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th (759-4630).
Baronet and Coronet, 3rd Ave. at 59th (355-1663).
Cinema I, Cinema II, and Cinema 3rd Avenue, 3rd Ave. at 60th (753-6022).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd (513-5408).
Gemini I and 2, 2nd Ave. at 64th (832-1670).
Beekman, 2nd Ave. at 66th (737-2622).
New York Twin, 2nd Ave. at 67th (744-7339).
68th St. Playhouse, 3rd Ave. at 68th (734-0302).
Tower East, 3rd Ave. at 71st (879-1313).
East 85th Street, 1st Ave. at 85th (249-5100).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th (534-1880).
Orpheum VII, 3rd Ave. at 86th (876-2400).
86th Street East Twin, 3rd Ave. at 86th (249-1144).

WEST SIDE

Film Forum, 209 W. Houston St. (727-8110).
Waverly I and 2, 6th Ave. at 3rd (929-8037).
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th (929-3350).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th (255-8800).
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd (513-5402).
23rd St. West Triplex, 333 W. 23rd (989-0060).
Guild, 33 W. 50th (757-2406).
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th (765-7600).
57th St. Playhouse, 110 W. 57th (581-7360).
Carnegie Hall Cinemas, 7th Ave. between 56th and 57th (265-2520).
Angelika 57, 225 W. 57th (586-1900).
Paris, 4 W. 58th (980-5656).
Cinema 3, 2 W. 59th (752-5959).
Columbus Circle, B'way at 61st (247-5070).
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd (265-7466).
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, B'way at 63rd (757-2280).
Regency, B'way at 67th (724-3700).
Lincoln Square, B'way at 68th (336-5000).
84th Street Sixplex, B'way at 84th (877-3600).
Thalia, B'way at 95th (316-4962).
Metro Cinema I and 2, B'way at 99th (222-1200).
Olympia I and II, B'way at 107th (865-8128).

TIMES SQUARE AREA

Criterion Center, B'way at 44th (354-0900).
Embassy I, B'way at 46th (302-0494).
Embassy 2, 3, and 4, 7th Ave. at 47th (730-7262).
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at B'way (869-8340).
National Twin, B'way at 44th (869-0950).

REVIVALS

(The following notes are by Pauline Kael, Terrence Rafferty, and Michael Sragow. Theatre addresses and phone numbers appear with the listings following these notes.)

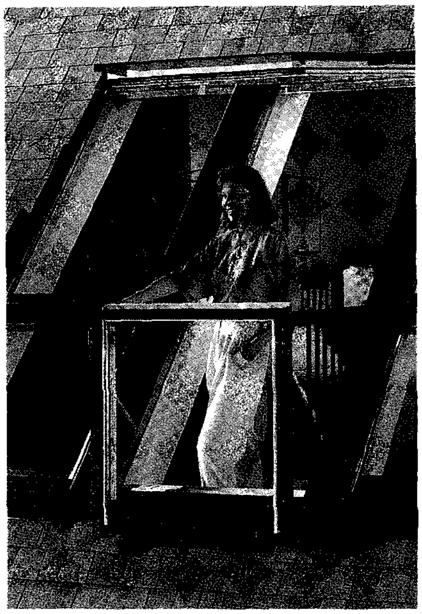
Blow Out (1981)—On paper this conspiracy movie, written and directed by Brian De Palma, might seem to be just a political thriller, but it has a rapt intensity that makes it unlike any other political thriller. Playing an adult (his first), and an intelligent one, John Travolta has a vibrating physical sensitivity like that of a very young Brando, and Nancy Allen, as a cuddly blonde he rescues from a car crash, has a flirty iridescence. It's as if De Palma had finally understood what technique is for; this is the first film he made about the things that really matter to him. With John Lithgow and Dennis Franz. Cinematography by Vilmos Zsigmond.—P.K. (American Museum of the Moving Image; March 26.)

Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia (1974)—Although Sam Peckinpah was just forty-eight when he shot this Mexican gothic, it plays like a frantic last stand. Warren Oates stars as a seedy saloon pianist who journeys with his beloved (Isela Vega) into the badlands to decapitate a charming stud and deliver the bagged head for a ten-thousand-dollar payoff. The movie is a coarse, ramshackle construction, packed with betrayal, revenge, and paranoia. Peckinpah gussies it up with political jokes about latter-day feudal overlords and gangsters who act like corporation men, but only the script's most outré aspect—Oates's buddy love and buddy hate for Garcia's festering head—has any humor or resonance. Cultists revere the film because "there's so much Sam in it"; maybe, but there's little of his artistry. Peckinpah co-wrote the script with Gordon Dawson, from a story by the director and Frank Kowalski.—M.S. (Walter Reade Theatre; March 23-25.)

The Conversation (1974)—Francis Ford Coppola's near-triumphant movie about a hermetic, guilt-wracked bugging master named Harry Caul (Gene Hackman), who believes he hears intimations of murder on his surveillance tapes. When it premièred, the technological tricks and sleek corporate backdrop evoked Watergate. But the movie also captures a more elusive and universal fear—that of losing the power to respond, emotionally and morally, to the evidence of one's senses.—M.S. (American Museum of the Moving Image; March 26.)

Cross of Iron (1977)—In his only modern-war movie—about Germans battling Soviets, and one another, during the Battle of Krymskaya in 1943—Sam Peckinpah creates a landscape of horror on the Russian front. He captures gut-wrenching atrocities, but his uncanny use of explosions to punctuate scenes matter-of-factly is what jolts viewers into the combatants' rattled minds. Despite some awkward dialogue, he pulls off astonishing moments, like a soldier slapping a passionate kiss on a distraught bunkermate to shock him into silence. James Coburn's leathery presence is ideal for the role of Sergeant Steiner, whose sole remaining devotion is to his platoon. The brilliantly edited section in which Steiner recuperates at a hospital and keeps seeing his men (or no men) in place of other maimed and wounded patients says more about the insidious residue of war than any tract. James Hamilton and Walter Kelley wrote the script (Julius J. Epstein also gets a credit), based on Willi Heinrich's novel.—M.S. (Walter Reade Theatre; March 26-27.)

The Killer Elite (1975)—Sam Peckinpah's poetic, corkscrew vision of the modern world, claustrophobically exciting. The somewhat incoherent story is about a professional killer (James Caan) who turns against his employers—a company with C.I.A. connections—but the energy and the humor appear to derive from Peckinpah's own desire for revenge against his movie-business em-



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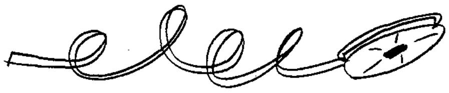
PROJECTIONS



Against the Grain

Howard Moss once wrote that the emotional force of Elizabeth Bishop's poetry would never reach people "who do not understand how feeling is enhanced by restraint." The same goes for Linus Roache's tight-lipped performance as the gay, tortured, theologically conservative Father Greg in the new movie "Priest" (which opens March 24, and is reviewed in The Current Cinema). But don't dismiss the thirty-year-old actor as just one more victim of *le mal anglais*, emotional repression: "In that respect, I have made a deliberate effort *not* to specialize in Englishness," he told me recently. In his work with the Royal Shakespeare Company and other British repertory groups, he has shunned the standard choices for handsome young leads: he's done "Richard II" but not "Hamlet," "Love's Labour's Lost" but not "Much Ado About Nothing." He has no plans to go Hollywood, he says. And he's a vegetarian who doesn't seek out the high life once filming ends, unless you count a recent trek through Nepal. In other words, he's not, as American headlines keep stamping him, "the next Hugh Grant." (Grant is hardly the type to talk unironically, as Roache does, about his spiritual strivings.) Ralph Fiennes comes closer to the mark—and, in fact, Roache and Fiennes had an early success together at the R.S.C., in a Nicholas Hytner staging of "King Lear."

It's difficult to imagine one of Roache's contemporaries playing Father Greg with anything quite like this actor's brand of understatement. When I asked him how he had maintained his reserve while volcanic passions swirled around him, he replied, "I was very aware of not wanting to put a single foot wrong." He credits the film's director, Antonia Bird, with fostering the collaborative ethos that made the performance possible. "Antonia," he told me, "had a way of keeping things going even when the Catholic diocese in Liverpool banned us from using their churches and the shoot was being hounded by Liverpool tabloid reporters, whose newspapers were running headlines every day like SEX ON THE ALTAR! I guess restraint isn't the only English disease."

—Brendan Lemon

ployers. With Gig Young, Robert Duvall, Burt Young, Bo Hopkins, and Arthur Hill. From a script by Marc Norman and Stirling Silliphant.—P.K. (Walter Reade Theatre; March 24-25.)

The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp (1943)—In a mock epic by the producing-directing-writing team of Emeric Pressburger and Michael Powell, a British gentleman officer who is a hero of the Boer War becomes an anachronism when the world's armies start to practice total warfare. This plush, lilting production can now be seen at its full length (a hundred and sixty-three minutes)—and, like "The Leopard" or "Once Upon a Time in America," the longer it gets, the better it gets. Roger Livesey is both subtle and robust as the officer: he demonstrates how the hide on a hidebound man grows, with emotional scar tissue and accreted convention. Anton Walbrook is agreeably suave as his best friend, a German soldier, and Deborah Kerr is springy and intense in a difficult triple role, playing three separate embodiments of the hero's romantic ideal. The movie has been underrated *and* overrated. James Agee hit the right balance when he wrote, in 1945, that it "shows a continuous feeling for the charm and illuminating power of mannerism, speech, and gesture used semiritually. . . ." Loosely based on David Low's cartoons.—M.S. (Film Forum 2; March 23-24.)

The Spy in Black (1939)—The first collaboration of director Michael Powell and screenwriter Emeric Pressburger was a polished, stirring First World War thriller. Conrad Veidt embodies nobility and command as a gallant German submarine skipper on an espionage mission to the base of the British North Sea Fleet. Valerie Hobson is a double agent posing as an Orkneys schoolmistress. She mixes it up romantically both with Veidt and with an embittered British Navy officer (Sebastian Shaw); the Germans' attempt at sabotage pivots on this romantic triangle. Released a year and a half after Pressburger wrote the script (reworking Roland Pertwee's adaptation of a novel by J. Storer Clouston), the movie gained an unexpectedly urgent topicality when Hitler's U-boats began sinking British ships, including one in the Orkneys. Seen today, it's civilized escapism: even when the action turns explosive and the characters volatile, you're entertained rather than assaulted.—M.S. (Film Forum 2; March 22.)

The Wild Bunch (1969)—Sam Peckinpah's Western epic—perhaps the greatest American movie—is a brilliant, suspenseful action picture about a band of outlaws on the run in south Texas and Mexico in the days before the First World War. It has been restored to its full two-hour-and-twenty-five-minute length, and the restored scenes—mostly flashbacks to painful moments in the life of the gang's leader (William Holden)—deepen and complicate the viewer's responses to the film's violent set pieces. The voluptuous carnage in the opening shoot-out and in the climactic massacre is more disturbing than ever, because it's now tinged with the melancholy of an aging killer.The superb supporting cast includes Robert Ryan, Ernest Borgnine, Ben Johnson, and Warren Oates.—T.R. (3/6/95) (Lincoln Square.)

LATE RUNS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves. (246-1583)—"Mrs. Parker and the Vicious Circle" (Alan Rudolph). . . . "Interview with the Vampire" (Neil Jordan). . . . "To Live" (Zhang Yimou, in Mandarin). . . . "Death and the Maiden" (Roman Polanski). . . . "Disclosure" (Barry Levinson). . . . "Nell" (Michael Apted).

Film Forum 2 and 3, 209 W. Houston St. (727-8110)—**theatre 2:** A program of films by the team of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger. March 22: "The Spy in Black" (†) and "Contraband" (1940). . . . March 23-24: "The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp" (†). . . . March 25-27: "The Tales of Hoffmann" (1951). . . . From March 28: "49th Parallel" (1941) and "The Volunteer" (1943). . . . **theatre 3:** "Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!" (1965, Russ Meyer), "Mamma Roma" (1962, Pier Paolo Pasolini; in Italian), and "I Am Cuba" (†).

Little Theatre, Public Theatre, 425 Lafayette St. (598-7171)—Through March 28: "Last Tango in Paris" (1972, Bernardo Bertolucci; in French and English).

Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363)—"Naked Killer" (Clarence Fok).

New Directors/New Films—A festival of international films. March 22 at 6: "Postman" (He Jianjun, China). . . . ¶ March 22 at 9: "Art for Teachers of Children" (Jennifer Montgomery, United States). . . . ¶ March 23 at 6 and March 25 at 9: "Vive l'Amour" (Tsai Ming-liang, Taiwan). . . . ¶ March 23 at 9 and March 25 at 3:30: "Deadly Maria" (Tom Tykwer, Germany). . . . ¶ March 24 at 6 and March 26 at 1: "Only the Brave" (Ana Kokkinos, Australia). . . . ¶ March 24 at 9 and March 25 at 1: "New Jersey Drive" (Nick Gomez, United States). . . . ¶ March 25 at 6 and March 26 at 3:30: "Trop de Bonheur" (Cédric Kahn, France). . . . ¶ March 26 at 6 and March 28 at 9: "A Light Sensitive Story" (Pal Erdoss, Hungary). . . . ¶ March 26 at 9 and March 28 at 6: "Eclipse" (Jeremy Podeswa, Canada). (Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. For information, call 875-5610.)

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center, 165 W. 65th St., plaza level (875-5600)—A retrospective of the films of Sam Peckinpah. March 22 at 2 and 6:15 and March 23 at 4:15: "The Getaway" (1972). . . . March 22 at 4:20 and 8:35: "Junior Bonner" (1971). . . . March 23 at 2 and 9, March 24 at 4:20 and 8:50, and March 25 at 6:35: "Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia" (†). . . . March 24 at 2 and 6:30 and March 25 at 4:15 and 8:45: "The Killer Elite" (†). . . . March 26 at 4:15 and 8:45 and March 27 at 2 and 6:30: "Cross of Iron" (†). . . . March 26 at 6:40: "Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid" (1973). . . . March 27 at 4:25 and 9 and March 28 at 2: "Convoy" (1978). . . . March 28 at 4:15: "The Osterman Weekend" (1983). . . . ¶ March 23 at 6:30: "Sleepover" (1995, John Sullivan). . . . ¶ March 25-26 at 2: "Flipper" (1963, James Clark), with Chuck Connors and Luke Halpin.

Susan Synarski

At Walter Reade Theatre, Luke Halpin in "Flipper."

American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (1-718 784-0077)—March 26 at 2: "The Conversation" (†). . . . ¶ March 26 at 4:30: "Blow Out" (†).

A Different Light Bookstore, 151 W. 19th St. (989-4850)—A Sunday-night series of free films (and popcorn). On March 26 at 7, the feature will be Terence McNally's "The Ritz" (1976, Richard Lester), with Jack Weston, Rita Moreno, Jerry Stiller, Kaye Ballard, F. Murray Abraham, and Treat Williams.

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—March 28 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9:30: "Van Gogh" (1992, Maurice Pialat; in French), with Jacques Dutronc.

Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5181)—March 23-26: The New York Underground Film Festival.

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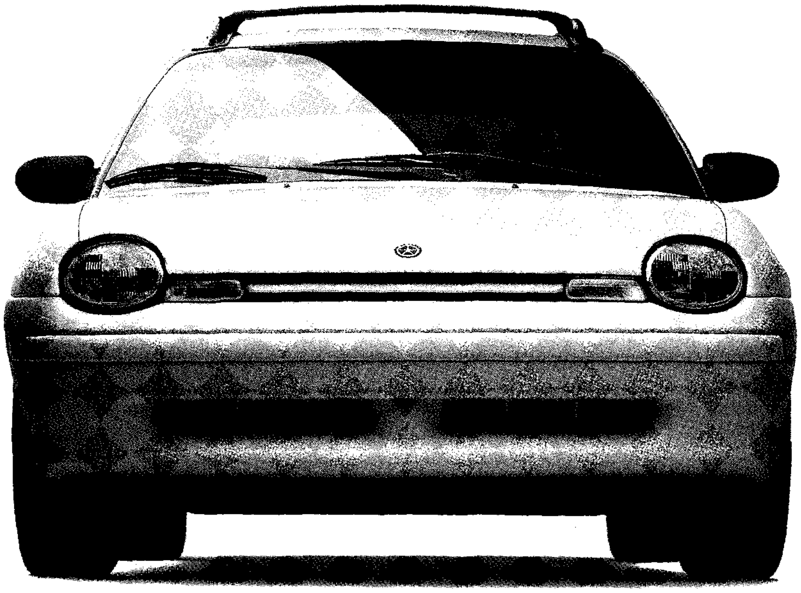

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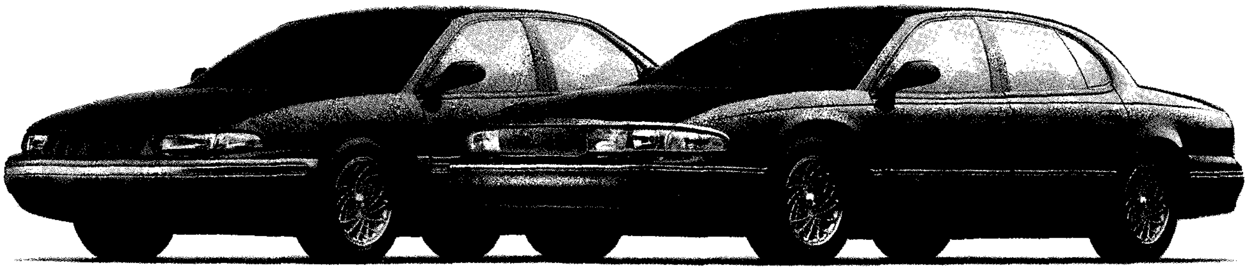

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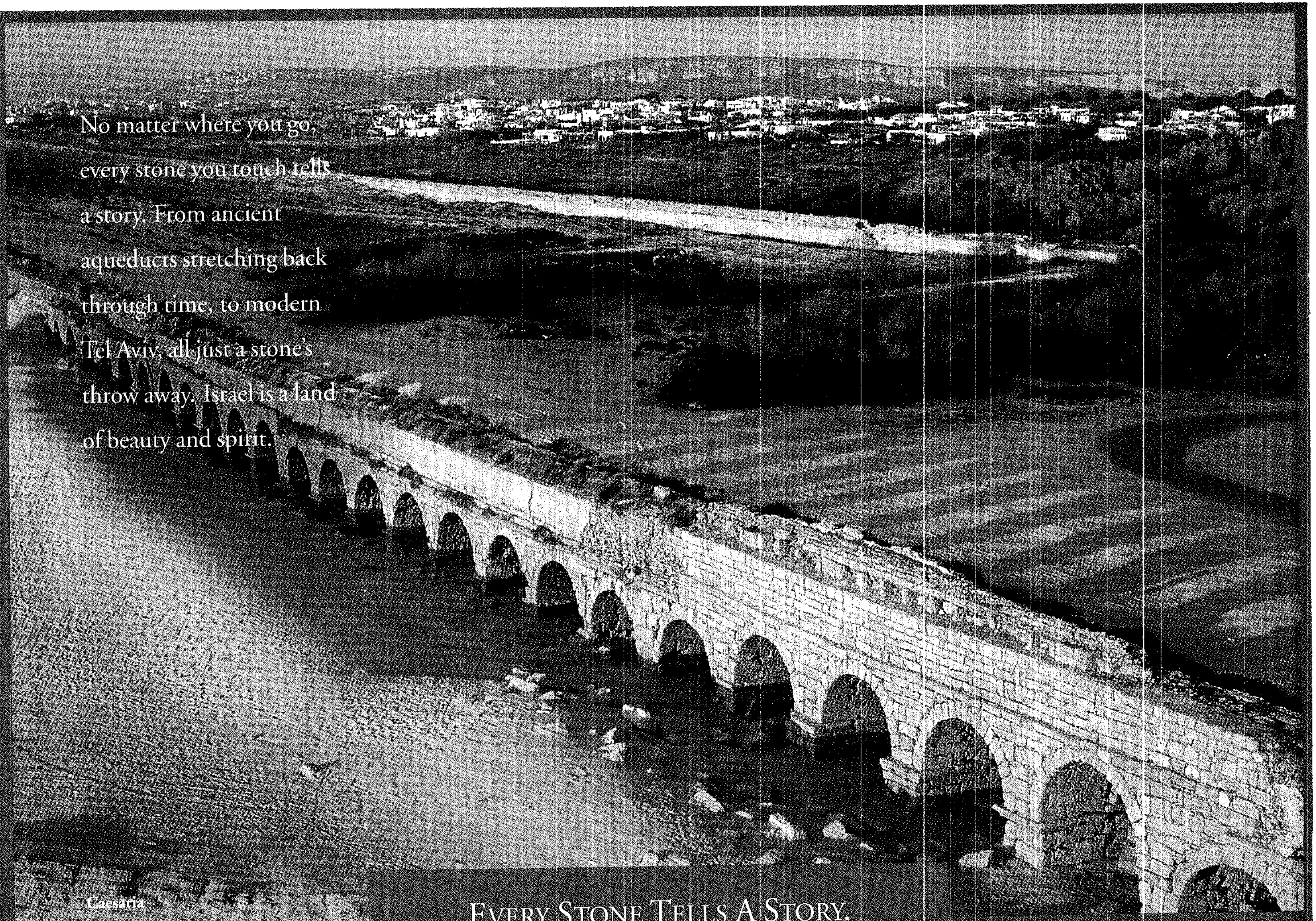

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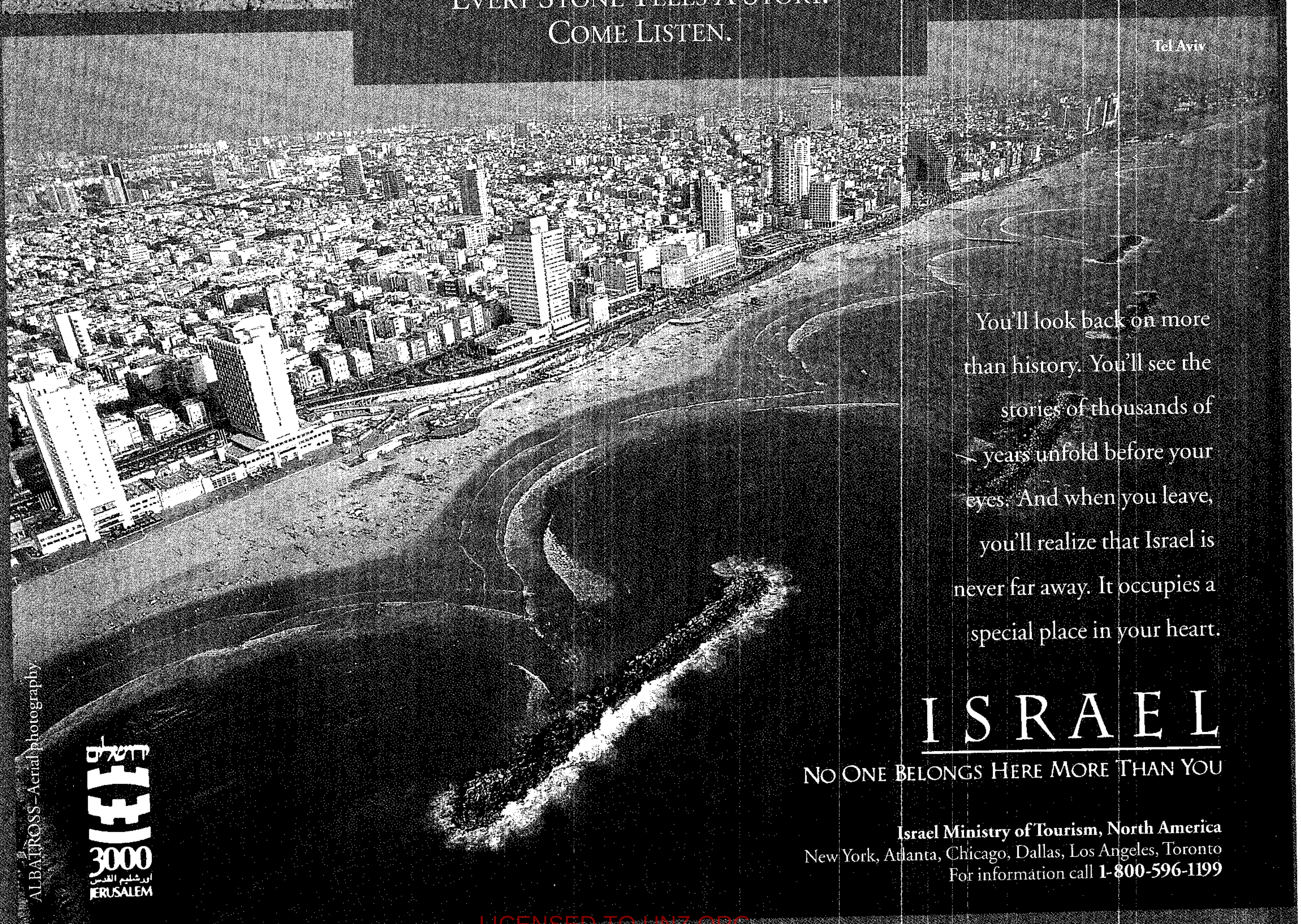

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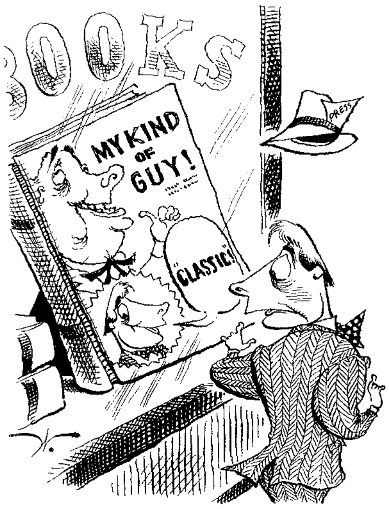
THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

WORDS RIGHT OUT OF THEIR MOUTHS

The collecting of the quotations that are formally called advance praise but are vulgarly known as blurbs has always been one of the book-publishing world's shadier practices. Friends blurb friends and are later blurbed in return; publishers lean on their more famous writers to blurb the lesser lights on their lists. Now, in a rather scary bit of synergy, the ethics of publishing have met the ethics of politics and given rise to a new phenomenon: the blurb that was never meant to be.

The first Washington sighting came a few weeks ago, when Times Books came out with "Middle Class Dreams," by the President's pollster, Stan Greenberg. On the jacket were four blurbs. Two were expected, from fellow-Clintonites James Carville and George Stephanopoulos. Two others, though, came from surprising sources: the NBC political correspondent Gwen Ifill, whose professional position would seem to preclude the endorsing of political figures, and the Republican pollster Frank Luntz. Stan Greenberg "just doesn't have a finger on the people's pulse; he's got an IV injected into it. He's the best," Luntz blurbed, of his professional opponent. Ifill declared, "Greenberg has made himself an expert on taking the pulse of the electorate. . . . He often acts as a sort of people's truth squad." As it turns out, both had indeed written those words, but neither had intended to help the pollster and his publisher sell books. Ifill's quote was taken from a *Times* article she wrote in 1992; Luntz's quote was lifted from a 1994 *Wall Street Journal* article. (Ifill is "stunned and somewhat appalled" to find herself an unwitting blurber; Luntz says he doesn't mind at all.) Even Stephanopoulos's quote proved to be lifted: it came from Ifill's article.


BOOKS
MY KIND OF GUY!
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PRESS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MICHAEL WITTE

The Greenberg case, it develops, is only the beginning. A far more audacious use of the hostile-camp blurb is in the planning stages. When Newt Gingrich's historical science-fiction novel, "1945," goes on sale this summer, potential buyers will no doubt be impressed by the ringing praise offered up for the Speaker's maiden literary effort by luminaries of Gingrich's nemesis, the establishment press. "An instant classic!" Sam Donaldson says. And Maureen Dowd, of the *Times*, says, "Newt Gingrich has certainly proved that politics and science fiction do mix. Now, there's a delicious doom. . . . I am eager to see how his sci-fi book comes out."

Gingrich's publisher, Jim Baen, of Baen Books, says that he intends to build a national advertising campaign around the Dowd and Donaldson quotes, and, indeed, he has already begun: the media kit for "1945" includes a prominent use of the Dowd quote. Baen happily admits that the quotes "may be taken a tiny, tiny bit out of context." (He sees any contextual fiddling he indulged in as fitting retribution for the hoo-ha with which the press greeted advance selections from "1945.") Dowd and Donaldson did say these things—more or less—but they meant to mock Gingrich, not to plug him. When Dowd broke the news last December of Gingrich's literary efforts, she wrote, tongue in cheek, "Now that I realize he can talk like Cotton Mather and write like Jacqueline Susann, I am eager to see how his sci-fi book comes out." The "delicious doom" crack was meant as a parody of Gingrich's own writing. Donaldson uttered his remarks recently on the ABC television show "Day One," and they, too, were meant to parody a particularly purple patch of Gingrichite prose: the Speaker's description of a "pouting sex kitten . . . sitting athwart" the hero's chest. Donaldson's quote in its entirety was "This is an instant classic which will be draped athwart the Speaker's neck by his opponents in every election he runs in from now on."

It would not be accurate to say that Baen is worried that one of his unwilling blurbers might sue. It would be entirely accurate to say that he is praying that one or all of them will. "Tell Maureen and Sam, 'Please, please, please try to stop me,' " Baen said. "The only thing I'm missing is the publicity of a court action."

A MODEL AFFAIR

The model Rachel Williams, who is twenty-seven years old, blond, and large-boned, bears a certain resemblance to the model Hazel Morse, the anti-heroine of Dorothy Parker's short story "Big Blonde," who is described as "a large, fair woman of the type that incites some men when they use the word 'blonde' to click their tongues and wag their heads roguishly." Rachel Williams couldn't care less if men would like to wag any part of their anatomy in her direction, given her current romantic involvement with the English punk-rock musician Alice Temple, with whom she has lived for the past five months in London, and with whom she made a recent visit to Manhattan.

What Williams projects in front of the lens may be blond but *it is not* "bubbly." A favorite of the Valkyrie-minded photographer Helmut Newton, she conveys disaffection and boredom in photographs. Hers is not a look of uncomplicated insouciance. Nor has she opted for the real-life scenario that most models—our culture's version of Idealized Woman—follow: marriage to a rock musician or two, children, and the unhappiness inherent in avoiding the issue of female independence. Rachel Williams is a model, but she is not mute.

RECENTLY, sitting across from Temple over lunch at a midtown restaurant, sipping a Coke and wearing a blue T-shirt that read "Bud Light," Williams talked about her former boyfriend of three and a half years, the restaurant entrepreneur Eric Goode. "That was the longest relationship I've ever had," she said. "Eric is still a good friend, but he was a terrible boyfriend. He had that whole male intimacy problem. Thank God I don't have to deal with that anymore."

Temple, who has short-cropped, hennaed hair and sports a leather wrist-band, takes an affectionate but proprietary interest in Williams' affairs. She listened intently as Williams said that she won't allow herself to become "a poster child for lesbians"; that she refuses to "become depressed over my grandmother being the only member of my family who's not into being supportive"; and that she would develop "a new head about other career options" should she lose lucrative advertising and editorial work as the result of her open relationship with a woman. About this possibility, Williams sounds unfazed: "We'll see what happens," she said. "In London, the tabloids were awful," Temple recalled, between bites of broiled fish, in her slightly husky voice. "They had headlines like 'Leggy Supermodel Steals "Our" Alice.' " Arching her pale, nearly ghostly eyebrows, Williams said, "It's not really a question of being 'out,' because I was never in the closet. I guess this brings up a lot of issues. But I'm used to it. As a model, you're *constantly judged. Every minute.*"

Williams is a native New Yorker, the daughter of the eminent architect Tod Williams. She herself majored in architecture at Columbia University, graduating last year. She did not begin modelling until she was twenty-one, the age when other models generally start thinking about becoming actresses or "psychic friends," or retiring. "I could have started modelling when I was ten," Williams said. "I was five feet six inches tall then and had little titties. But my mom said no. She was right. I would have ended up being a horror. Like Naomi Campbell, who started way too young. Now her perspective is a bit skewed."

Williams, like other women in her field, is a confirmed model-watcher. She assesses models in much the way a connoisseur of fine art appreciates an object, ever mindful of its commercial value and aesthetic appeal. Of the seventeen-year-old modelling sensation Bridget Hall, Williams said, "Oh, she's cute." And then, taking a sip of her Coke, she cast a mock-seductive, sidelong look at Temple.

EPILOGUE

SOME people thought that David Leavitt's novel "While England Sleeps" was stolen from the English poet Sir Stephen Spender's autobiography, "World Within World"; others thought that it was merely inspired by it. The debate didn't so much end as fall dormant. Five months after the novel appeared, Viking, Leavitt's publisher, settled Spender's lawsuit by agreeing not to sell any more copies. For a time, "While England Sleeps" just went away.

Last week, though, the novel—and perhaps the controversy—was resurrected. Leavitt has just signed a contract for a new book with Houghton Mifflin, and in October the company plans to publish a new edition of "While England Sleeps," revised according to the list of seventeen offending passages cited in Spender's lawsuit. A few days ago, Leavitt, who now lives in Florence, offered some opinions of the whole affair:

On Spender: "I think the way he decided to handle his anger put him in a position of being an enemy to literature."

On the British press: "I never encountered anything like what I encountered once the English bloodhounds were on my trail."

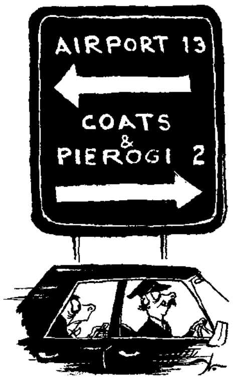
On the British: "In America, people value being nice, but in England they don't really value being nice."

On whether the book will come out in England: "At this point, I'm simply happy that it's being published in *English*."

On telephones: "I became very paranoid about the telephone, because whenever it rang my heart would start racing and I would think it was inevitably some further piece of bad news relating to this whole nasty business. I still panic whenever I hear it ring."

On civility: "I will never, ever sue somebody over a literary matter."

BRIGHTON BEACH MEMOIR



MITCH MARKOWITZ, who wrote "Good Morning, Vietnam," and was here from Los Angeles recently:

"I was in the city for thirty-six hours to work on a *fragrance commercial*, and I finished up early and was thinking about going to Brighton Beach before I left. I had seen a picture of a Russian Army officer's coat in a magazine, and the caption said I could buy it there. The fragrance company sent a car to take me to

J.F.K. I was worried about rush hour, so I had the driver pick me up a few hours early, because I am more nervous than most people about catching planes. We start talking, and I realize he's Russian. I tell him about the coat, and he says, 'Forget about it. You will not make your plane.'

"As it turns out, there's no traffic on the way to the airport. We arrive, and he looks at his watch and turns around and says, 'Maybe, maybe we can go.' By this time, I don't want to go anymore. 'I was just telling you this story because you're Russian,' I say. He says, 'I'm going to get on the Belt Parkway. We just going to look at the traffic.'

"It's foggy and rainy. We're on our way to Brighton Beach, and there's a little bottleneck. He says, 'Don't worry, I can always turn around. I know you really want that coat.' I say, 'I don't really want it that much anymore. I'm very nervous about the plane now.' We leave the parkway and enter Brighton Beach. I ask 'Do you know what store has this coat?' and he says 'I don't know exactly, I couldn't say for sure, but it's just over here.' We go three places maybe—no coat. Finally, we're dealing with a guy who's selling hats and trinkets on the street. He doesn't have the coat. I'm looking at my watch. I have a *lot* of anxiety. We get back in the car. A guy is running down the street toward us. I'm thinking about the Belt Parkway. I'm very far from wanting the coat now. The guy running down the street arrives, he's got the coat. In his apartment. He brings it back, and it's too small. He gets one that fits. We settle on a price. I have the coat now, and I'm ready to catch the plane. The driver turns around and says, 'Are you hungry?' 'Not in the least,' I say. 'I'm about to have a heart attack. I just want to catch the plane.' He says, 'You want to eat pierogi.'

"On the way to the pierogi place, he says, 'Let me see that coat.' I say, 'You want to try it on?' 'No, I want to look at it.' I give it to him and he says, 'These are not the original buttons. I know, because when I was in Russia I wear this coat in the Army. We have to go back.' He turns the car away from the airport and back to Brighton Beach, and I'm about dying. Somehow we find the guy, and he runs up to his apartment and comes back with a bag of buttons he gives me. Then the pierogi place. It's taking longer than it should. He says, 'The guy, he's having trouble making the small change, it's no problem.' It takes even longer. 'It's a problem with the cooker,' he says. 'We'll be fine.'

"I actually make it to the terminal about thirty minutes early, and I have my coat, which seems like the only important thing in the world to me now. 'You really wanted that coat,' he says. He looks really happy. He extends his hand, and I give him a big hug, and when I get home I write him a thank-you letter.

"In L.A. a couple of days later, I show the coat to a producer I work with, and he says, 'Let me ask you something. When will you ever have the opportunity to wear that here?' "

VON STADE'S OPERATIC LIFE

FREDERICA VON STADE, the mezzo-soprano, may be one of the world's great opera singers, but she is not what you would call a diva. For one thing, the grand diva roles are not suited to her lyric, sunny voice and winsome appearance. "I sang Carmen once," she said the other day, "and the costume fell off." Von Stade has auburn hair and a trim, athletic figure, and some of her most memorable performances—notably Cherubino in Mozart's "Le Nozze di Figaro" and Octavian in Strauss's "Der Rosenkavalier"—have been as teen-age boys. Mainly, though, von Stade is not thought of as a diva because divas are vain, pampered, and frequently haughty, while she is so uncommonly *nice* that her niceness is often the first thing that colleagues mention about her.

Just recently, von Stade left her home in California to set herself up in a small sublet apartment not far from the Metropolitan Opera, where she launched her singing career twenty-five years ago. This week, the Met will commemorate her silver anniversary at the première of a new production of Debussy's "Pelléas et Mélisande," with von Stade as Mélisande. Between rehearsals, von Stade reflected on her career. She was pleased, she said, because, for the first time in a while, she'll get to appear at the Metropolitan in a dress.

VON STADE grew up in the quiet New Jersey farm community of Oldwick, and was, she said, "a notorious tomboy." Her upbringing was comfortable—her great-grandfather was a lawyer for J. P. Morgan—but it was not idyllic. In April, 1945, six weeks before she was born, her father, a first lieutenant in the United States Army, was killed in Germany by a land mine. Her mother, Sara, quickly remarried, and her new husband just as quickly left her. Before long, Sara developed a drinking problem. "She would go to a party and not come home, and I would find her asleep in her car, off the road," von Stade said. "But she simply worshipped my older brother and me, which I think was the source of my confidence. And she was so theatrical."

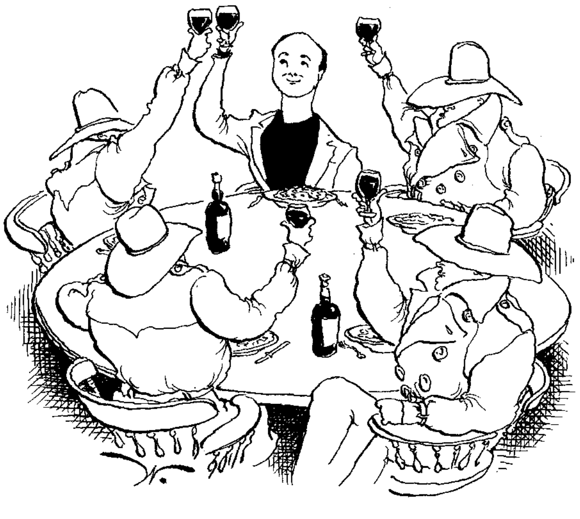
Von Stade had a natural talent for singing, but she didn't learn to read music as a child. One of her classmates, now New Jersey's governor, Christine Todd Whitman, recalls, "We did Gilbert and Sullivan at school every spring, and she usually got the lead." In her early twenties, von Stade enrolled in the Mannes College of Music, and her voice teacher there, the late Sebastian Engelberg, persuaded her to audition for the Met. In 1970, she made her operatic début. Three years later, in Paris, she married Peter Elkus, a bass-baritone whom she had met at Mannes. They had two daughters, and after Engelberg died Elkus became his wife's vocal coach. Von Stade now ruefully agrees that her friends who warned her that this arrangement wouldn't work were right: by 1985, she and Elkus were separated, and by 1990 they were divorced.

The breakup took its toll on von Stade, who is a devout Catholic. One day, she recalled, "I took an acting class where one of the exercises was to scream your head off, and I threw myself into it totally. The next day, I noticed that something was wrong." One of her vocal cords had become swollen, and it took a year and a half of therapy to repair the damage, during which time she was obligated to keep performing. Meanwhile, Elkus sued von Stade for a share of her earnings during the decade he was her coach, claiming that he had sacrificed his career to advance hers. After seven years of bitter litigation—and an appellate-court ruling in Elkus's favor—Elkus and von Stade settled the matter privately. "If I'd known then what I know now—that the only good legal resolution is settlement—my family, my ex-husband, and I could have been spared years of deep sorrow," she said.

Von Stade is now happily married to Michael Gorman, a California businessman, who when they met, in 1988, had been to one opera in his life. Now that she is nearly fifty, her voice has grown deeper and darker, and her repertoire has at last shifted away from roles like Cherubino. This season, she got spectacular notices for her performance at the San Francisco Opera as the Marquise de Merteuil in the world première of Conrad Susa's "The Dangerous Liaisons," based on the Laclos novel, and people close to her were surprised at how convincingly she portrayed so evil a character. "This was the woman that my education both at home and at Catholic school taught me never to be," she said. "Of course, that character is in me. I just keep it well controlled and forced down into the depths of my being."

BREAKING BREAD WITH THE MANDUCATIS GANG

About once a month, a group of tough-guy crime writers meets at a Queens restaurant called Manducatis to trade cop stories, trial anecdotes, and Mafia gossip. This brutish, heat-packing version of the Algonquin Round Table doesn't need a particular reason to get together, but on a Sunday night earlier this month it had one: a recent string of triumphs by Lorenzo Carcaterra, who, at forty-one, is the group's youngest member. Carcaterra's second book, "Sleepers"—a story, set in Hell's Kitchen, about four young friends whose lives are torn apart when a prank backfires—won't be published until this summer, but last month it sold to the movies for more than two million dollars, and Barry Levinson has agreed to direct. Then, just when it seemed that Carcaterra could endure no more good news, he signed a two-book deal with Ballantine, in the high six figures.



The Manducatis gang began the evening with a toast to Carcaterra, then got down to the real business at hand—storytelling. The tales, it is understood, may be recycled into literature, but only with the teller's permission. They are flecked with anachronistic, streetwise terminology: crooks are still "wise guys," Mafia lower-downs are "spitters," and someone who is officially inducted into a certain family is a "made guy." New York City geography is described not by neighborhood but by precinct: one doesn't live on the Upper East Side; one lives "in the One-Nine."

Carcaterra's fellow crime writers are all a bit jaded about the pulp-to-screen phenomenon. They include Judge Edwin Torres, whose novel "Carlito's Way" was made into a movie; Vincent Patrick, who wrote both the novel and the movie "The Pope of Greenwich Village"; Sonny Grosso, the former New York City police detective who broke the drug-smuggling ring known as the French Connection, and who now runs a television production company that makes primarily—you guessed it—cop shows; and Vincent Hefferen, a retired police detective, who was the basis for the movie "Madigan."

As the food arrived at the table in heap after garlicky heap, the group endorsed a rumor that Carcaterra had heard about how John Gotti's arthritis had forced a cutback in his daily pushup routine, and rejected a story that Judge Torres passed along about how Gotti's I.Q. was a hundred and sixty. The writers wrangled over the future of the car chase in American cinema, and traded tales about working with De Niro, Pacino, and Brando. Not surprisingly, the group's politics are soundly right of center: at one point, a conversation blossomed on how much fun it would have been to throw the switch at Ted Bundy's electrocution. The "F" word received heavy usage; in the past, one invited guest was not asked back, "because she didn't cuss enough."

Occasionally, the old-timer lingo got confusing:

PATRICK: So then the priest whacks the boy.

CARCATERRA: Whacks him? You mean, he *hits* him.

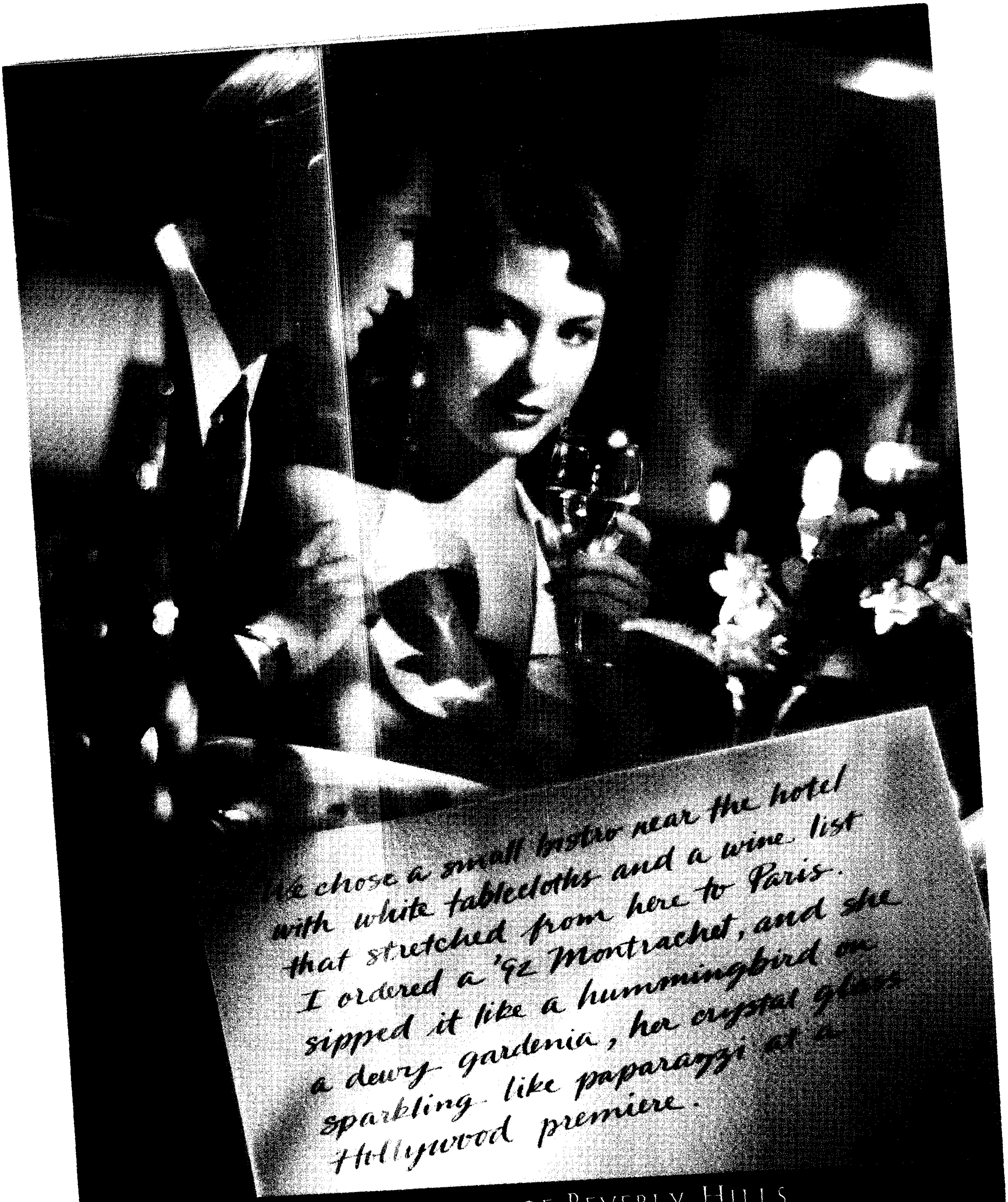
At about twelve-thirty, as the group was dissecting a loaf of Manducatis' tiramisù, Judge Torres took a moment to praise Carcaterra, calling him "a squeaky-clean kid who hit a couple of home runs." The Judge went on, "I admire him and I admire his writing." Carcaterra blushed—unaccustomed, still, to the compliments due a made guy.

SPEED . . .

For absolute proof that City Hall has not stopped striving for a better New York, even in these times of layoffs and budget cuts, one need only turn to the Giuliani administration's recently released "Management Report." There, on page 91, the Mayor promises that in the next year he will increase the average daytime speed of cars crossing from one side of midtown Manhattan to the other from a brisk 5.3 to a sizzling 5.9 miles per hour.

Ruben Ramirez, the Department of Transportation's traffic coördinator for Manhattan, says that this feat can be accomplished even in the face of the recent heavy cutbacks in his enforcement staff. The key, he says, is more aggressive towing, stricter anti-gridlock measures, and installation of new, computerized traffic lights. And if, in a perfect world, he had all the resources he needed? "I think we could do six or seven, and I'm not being outrageous," Ramirez said. Which means that in some dreamy future Manhattan it might actually be possible to drive across midtown faster than you can walk. ♦

This week's contributors: Michael Kelly, Hilton Als, Warren St. John, Alec Wilkinson, Fredric Dannen, W.S.J., Malcolm Gladwell.



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sipped it like a hummingbird on
a dewy gardenia, her crystal glass
sparkling like paparazzi at a
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ANNALS OF LAW

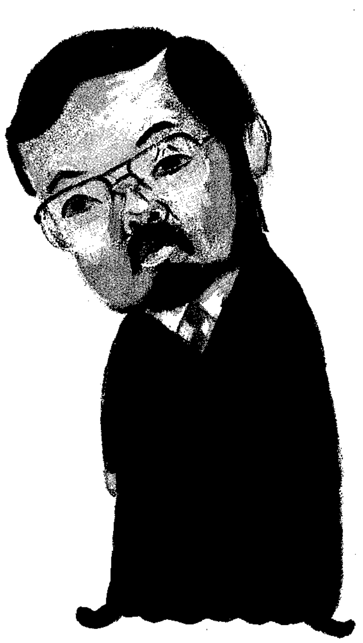
ITO AND THE TRUTH SCHOOL

What evidence should a jury see? Judge Ito's response in the Simpson case has caught the eye of a legal movement to challenge the status quo in criminal law.

BY JEFFREY TOOBIN

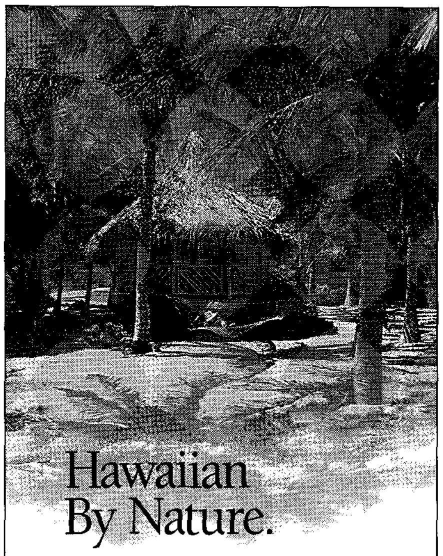
WITH the same words every morning—"Back on the record in the Simpson matter"—Lance A. Ito convenes the national town meeting. The lead players and their quirks are public touchstones: Johnnie L. Cochran, Jr.,'s courtly Southernisms ("Thank you very kindly, Your Honor"), Christopher Darden's haircut (he's not *quite* bald), Marcia Clark's theatrical winces of disgust at sundry defense tactics. Judge Ito presides dispassionately—almost phlegmatically—over the O. J. Simpson trial, betraying only the most modest of idiosyncrasies: a fondness for hourglasses and a willingness to show off virtually any flower arrangement that grateful viewers send him.

But on legal issues Ito has brought a distinctive method to the Simpson case, and it may well outlive the madness surrounding this multimedia extravaganza. Ito's judicial philosophy has spurred discussion in legal circles of one of the more important recent developments in criminal law. This change has followed a period when appraisals of judges' philosophical inclinations in criminal cases boiled down to one of two extremes: pro-prosecution or pro-defense. This stylized view has one set of judges who care a lot about locking criminals up and little about the civil liberties that the police may trample in the process, while their opposite numbers, it is said, hanker to reverse the convictions of even obviously guilty defendants when small technicalities of police procedures are not observed. This debate—famously between Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist and former Justice William J. Brennan, Jr.—has dominated criminal law for about three decades. It even surfaced in the United States Senate, where the Judiciary Committee held a hearing earlier this month on a bill that would abolish the exclusionary rule. In recent years, however, another school of thought has emerged, which challenges the assumptions behind this venerable, if somewhat stale, clash of ideas. The new view appeared first in the obscure byways of legal discourse—articles in law reviews and footnotes in appellate-court decisions—but it may now take on an unlikely visibility, for the principles underlying it coincide with those displayed by Judge Ito.


Ito seems determined that the trial he calls "a search for truth" not end in a hung jury.

AHMET GÖRGÜN

This third way in criminal law is based on the notion that, as Ito put it in one of his written rulings in the Simpson case, "the court must always remember this process is a search for truth." The observation that a trial is a search for truth might sound axiomatic to nonlawyers but is in fact the subject of intense ideological warfare. "This approach cuts across the traditional battle lines between pro-government and pro-defense," says Akhil Reed Amar, a professor at Yale Law School, who is one of the scholars most closely associated with the movement. "It says the paramount value is protecting innocent defendants from being wrongly convicted. But it is not at all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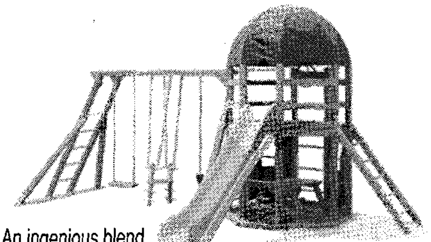
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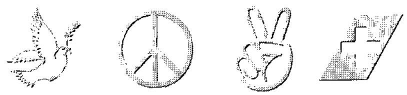
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troubled by guilty defendants who are convicted, even if the police may have violated some provisions of the Constitution in collecting the evidence." That, of course, is the rub.

For more than a generation, the judicial system's remedy for improper police work has been to exclude evidence—and therefore sometimes to let the guilty go free. Truth-school adherents say that, while they do not countenance unconstitutional action by the police, they believe that suppressing evidence is not necessarily the way to address such misbehavior. If the police violate someone's rights, they suggest, it might be better if that person sued the cops for money damages in a civil lawsuit—or, alternatively, if the offending officers were administratively sanctioned for their violations of the Constitution. But in any criminal case, according to the truth school, the jury should be able to hear all reliable evidence against the defendant, regardless of how the police behaved. William Stuntz, a professor at the University of Virginia School of Law and another leader in the movement, says, "My view is that the system spends too much time, energy, and attention on questions that go to the propriety of police evidence-gathering and too little on who did it." And Amar says, "Criminal trials shouldn't be a sport or a game where judges just try to even the odds between the two sides. The point is that the jury should have all the facts available to it to make the right decision."

Ito's performance in the Simpson trial suggests that he feels much the same way. "His rulings have shown great common sense and a real understanding of what a trial is all about," Amar says. Ito, it seems, is not one of the many judges who seek only a fair fight on the evidence; at the end of the trial, he wants the truth about what happened on Nicole Brown Simpson's doorstep last June 12th to emerge. Ito elliptically acknowledged as much in his famous interview with KCBS-TV last November—the one that complicated jury selection by adding to the swirl of pretrial publicity surrounding the case. Asked about his approach to judging, he said, "You have to have a certain desire to see that things come out right, that the right thing ought to be done, and that has to be something that is important to you."

THE roots of Ito's philosophy are reflected in both his style and his background. Ito comes to work early, around seven every morning. The Criminal Courts Building is still mostly empty when he slips into his chambers, on the ninth floor, just across a battered linoleum hallway from his now well-known courtroom, Department 103. A window at one end of his long, narrow office looks out over the Los Angeles *Times* building and beyond, to the many towers of downtown, but the vista is obscured by piles of papers on the windowsill. Ito has decorated in Neo-Workaholic style. Just two personal touches stand out from stacks of files and computer wires: a handsome formal portrait of Ito and his wife, Margaret York, who is one of the highest-ranking women in the Los Angeles Police Department, and a small stand of historical Japanese flags. Ito takes his heritage seriously. A third-generation Californian, he grew up knowing that his mother and father met in a Wyoming internment camp during the Second World War, and he has spoken movingly of the injustice done to loyal Americans like his parents. Even his name bears witness to the difficult days of the war: it honors a lawyer, Lance Smith, who helped protect the Ito family's property while they were interned.

Shortly before the Court TV camera on the wall of his courtroom comes to life, around nine o'clock, Ito strolls from his office to his bench and checks to see if the day's paperwork is in order. He doesn't wear his robe at that moment, so a plastic pocket liner full of pens peeks out from the breast pocket of his shirt. When he is in full judicial regalia, he tends to hunch up; his robe then blends into his black beard, giving him a soft, pudgy look. This is misleading. The forty-four-year-old Judge is trim, almost wiry, and is the veteran of a pair of marathons. On these morning visits, he will nod hello to any early-arriving lawyers and venture a look at the spectator benches to see if the press throng has been admitted.

Ito follows the media in the case closely. By his own admission, he is something of a news junkie—and an earnest student of popular culture in general. He reads five newspapers a day. Like many judges, Ito thinks lawyers talk too much—a feeling he has expressed in a characteristic way. "You watch 'L.A. Law' and see lawyers sum up the facts of a case, give all the moral and ethical considerations, and tell you how to rule—and do it all in five minutes," he told the *National Law Journal* in a 1991 interview. "It's great."

Ito, then, is not a judge who has spent the trial in a cloister. He is only too aware, through the media as well as through his private conversations, how difficult the search for truth will be for the jury weighing Simpson's fate. Specifically, it is common knowledge in the Criminal Courts Building that the spectre of a hung jury haunts the Simpson case. Black jurors in downtown Los Angeles, where Simpson is being tried, are said to be evening the score for the Rodney King case and other police outrages by punishing white prosecutors (and especially white cops) with hung juries. Such generalizations may be dubious, but they have certainly shaped the conventional wisdom about the Simpson case. Notwithstanding the evidence, which looks stronger for the government all the time, the consensus among courthouse journalists, criminal-defense lawyers, and even many prosecutors is that Simpson's jury will be hung. Such a prospect would unnerve any judge, but particularly one who, like Ito, hopes "that things come out right."

THOUGH the truth school in criminal procedure has no official party line (or even an official party), most of its followers share certain views. Many have concerns about, or even hostility to, the exclusionary rule. They also support strong discovery rules in criminal trials, which keep gamesmanship between prosecution and defense to a minimum. When judges must decide whether or not to provide information to the jury—about a defendant's prior record, say—the truth school generally believes that the jurors should hear it and draw their own conclusions. The influence of the school can be seen in the jurisprudence of such varied figures as Alex Kozinski, an outspoken appointee of President Ronald Reagan's to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, in California, and Justice Stephen Breyer, President Clinton's second appointee to

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the Supreme Court. The intellectual forebears of the movement include J. Edward Lumbard, Jr., and the late Henry J. Friendly, both moderate Republicans on the Second Circuit Court of Appeals, in New York. Amar himself reflects the eclectic nature of the movement. Just thirty-six years old, he was initially attracted to political issues by the Presidential campaigns of Robert F. Kennedy, George McGovern, and Morris Udall. He remains a Democrat, but he made his greatest splash in the academic world by calling, in March of 1994, for the abolition of one of the totems of judicial liberalism, the exclusionary rule.

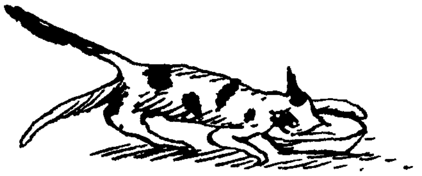
In its general terms, the exclusionary rule is simple. It requires that if the police collect evidence in violation of a defendant's rights under the Fourth Amendment—that is, in the course of an unreasonable search and seizure—the evidence may not be used against him. As the law developed, particularly in the Supreme Court during Earl Warren's tenure as Chief Justice, errors by police officers sometimes freed obviously guilty defendants. But, as public concern about crime has mounted in the years since the Warren Court, the rule has come under ever-stronger attack. The bill recently examined by the Judiciary Committee, which is sponsored by Senator Orrin Hatch, of Utah, reflects this conservative critique, notably in its determination to end the exclusionary rule altogether. It also reflects the influence of Amar and the truth school, because it contains provisions aimed at allowing victims of illegal searches to sue for money damages.

"The problem with the exclusionary rule is that it keeps incriminating evidence from the jury, so that, almost by definition, the rule helps only guilty defendants," Amar says. This problem has long been apparent to the judges who must apply the rule. Lawrence Lessig, a constitutional scholar at the University of Chicago Law School, says, "One problem with the exclusionary rule is that the judges know that applying it means guilty people must go free, and they don't like to have that happen. So what has developed is a systematic bias against applying the rule, and slowly the protections of the Fourth Amendment have been eviscerated. When the alternative is suppressing the evidence, judges are going to find that the police behavior was appropriate."

Conservatives had criticized the exclusionary rule for years, but the truth school has put a contemporary spin on the criticism—one much informed by the feminist contribution to legal academe over the past generation. "Brennan had a sportsman's model of criminal procedure, and it said that since defendants tend to be poor and black we want to even out the odds a little and let them try to exclude evidence," Amar says. "But a lot of feminists have pointed out in recent years that the victims of crime also tend to be poor and black, and often women. Excluding evidence doesn't help the victims—it hurts them. So, if the police violate someone's rights, then maybe that person should sue the police in a civil lawsuit." Rodney King, the nation's best-known victim of police misconduct, did just that, and won a multimillion-dollar verdict. (Such cases make up a good chunk of Johnnie Cochran's usual practice.) The alliance between prosecutors and feminists, which seems unlikely on the surface, has become a powerful force in recent developments in the law. "Just in rape law alone, prosecutors and feminists have worked together to do away with requirements that rapes be corroborated, that victims had to resist to the utmost of their ability, that rapists had to use force as traditionally defined," Sally Goldfarb, a professor at Rutgers Law School, says. "There are many prosecutors who are in the forefront of changing the law to reflect the interests of victims." Amar explains, "If you have a truth-seeking model of criminal law, and if you have incriminating evidence, the point is to let the jury hear all that evidence and let them decide what really happened."

ITO graduated from Boalt Hall, the noted law school of the University of California at Berkeley, in 1975, spent two years at a law firm, and then became a deputy district attorney in Los Angeles.

Ito's experience as a prosecutor, it seems, shaped his judicial outlook. He specialized in cases against violent Los Angeles gangs, and he was eventually assigned to a special unit dedicated to bringing these large and complex cases. (As a fringe benefit of this kind of work, he first met his future wife, who was then a homicide detective, at a murder scene at four o'clock one morning.) It was in 1983 and 1984, during the tenure of Robert Philibosian, one of the few Republicans to serve as Los Angeles District Attorney in recent years, that Ito's career took off.



"Lance was a Democrat, and I was a Republican," Philibosian told me recently. "But he was very sympathetic to the things we were trying to do in those days." One of the most important things Philibosian did after he left the D.A.'s office was to help launch a revolution aimed at toppling the California Supreme Court. During Ito's early years as a prosecutor, California's highest court stood out as perhaps the most liberal court in the nation. Led by Chief Justice Rose E. Bird and other appointees from Jerry Brown's two terms as governor, the seven-member court was embroiled in a long and rancorous war with prosecutors, which ended only when voters recalled Bird and two colleagues in 1986—the fight that Philibosian helped conduct. (The court is now solidly conservative.) "Lance was not crazy about Rose Bird," Perry Mocciaro, a law-school classmate of Ito's and still a friend, told me. "His feelings about her were no different from any other prosecutor's in the state." One of the most important buzzwords in the attack on Bird and other judicial liberals was "truth"—the word Ito has used in talking of the Simpson case.

Ito didn't directly participate in the recall effort, but he made his feelings about the Bird court unusually plain. His car in those days bore a license-plate frame with the words "California's Supreme Court"; the young prosecutor's vanity plate read, in commentary, "7 BOZOS." In 1987, Philibosian recommended Ito to his fellow-Republican Governor George Deukmejian. The Governor appointed Ito to the Municipal Court that year, and to the Superior Court, where he remains, in 1989. Once elevated to the bench, Ito changed his license plate, but not, it seems, the sentiments behind it.

IN the months leading up to the trial, Simpson's defense team attempted an extremely ambitious use of the exclu-

"And then we saw this huge temple that was carved from living rock, and I can't remember what it was called, but I remember thinking, Wow!"

• •

sionary rule. This was no surprise; the law professors who are the architects of Simpson's legal strategy—Alan Dershowitz, of Harvard Law School, and Gerald Uelmen, who until recently was the dean of Santa Clara University School of Law—are leading proponents of the exclusionary rule. In several motions, the Simpson team asked Judge Ito to suppress almost every piece of evidence the police had seized from Simpson's property in the days immediately after the murders. The defense lawyers asserted, among other things, that blood drops on Simpson's driveway had been illegally seized; that a detective had lied to get a warrant to search Simpson's home; that the search the police had conducted was broader than the warrant permitted; and that the search of Simpson's Ford Bronco was impermissible as well.

Ito denied the defense motions. In at least one instance, however, he did agree with Simpson's lawyers about the misbehavior of the police. In his affidavit in support of the application for a warrant to search Simpson's home, Detective Philip Vannatter had said, among other things, that early in the morning of June 13th Simpson left on an "unexpected" trip to Chicago, when in fact the trip had been planned. Ito conceded that this and other inaccurate statements in the warrant were "reckless," but what mattered most to him, it seemed, was that blood and other material found at Simpson's home were relevant to the defendant's guilt or innocence. Accordingly, the material should be presented to the jury. "There would have been a public uproar if the blood had been suppressed, and for good reason," Amar says. "Isn't the point of the trial to see who did it?"

In the light of Ito's rulings on these motions, it is easy to understand why some critics of the truth-oriented approach see it as little more than a restatement of traditional conservatism—just new garb for Rehnquist and company. "The truth school claims to be middle of the road on the Fourth Amendment, but it's pure Justice Scalia," Carol S. Steiker, a professor at Harvard Law School and a former public defender, says. "We all agree that the truth is an important, maybe even the paramount, value in criminal law. But it's not the only one. We'll definitely find more criminals if we allow the cops to search anywhere they want, any time they want. But how many of us would want to live in a society where the cops could do that?"

Truth-school adherents respond to this question by saying that their rules would better protect privacy rights. "If you created a system where people whose rights really were violated by the police had an actual chance of suing for damages—say, a worker's-compensation-style system, where people didn't have to go through a lot of procedures to get to court—then the police might really change their behavior," Lessig says. "Now the choice is whether or not to let the criminals go free. With a system based on civil damages, you'd actually have innocent people coming forward to claim damages. And, as for guilty people, they might still go to jail but could get some money if their rights were violated. And there wouldn't be the pressure to keep contracting the Fourth Amendment so you didn't have to let criminals go."

It is concerning matters unrelated to the politically charged debate over the exclusionary rule that proponents of the truth school—and Ito—have demonstrated that their views reflect something more than repackaged Rehnquist. Truth-school advocates generally take positions associated with liberals on such issues as guaranteeing effective assistance of counsel and controlling assembly-line-style plea bargaining. Members of the truth school (and Ito) are also passionate about the issue of discovery—making sure that both sides disclose their evidence to each other. In the Simpson trial, Ito went as far as to fine two of the defense lawyers for a discovery violation—specifically, failing to disclose their tape recording of Rosa Lopez, the maid at the house next door to the defendant's house.

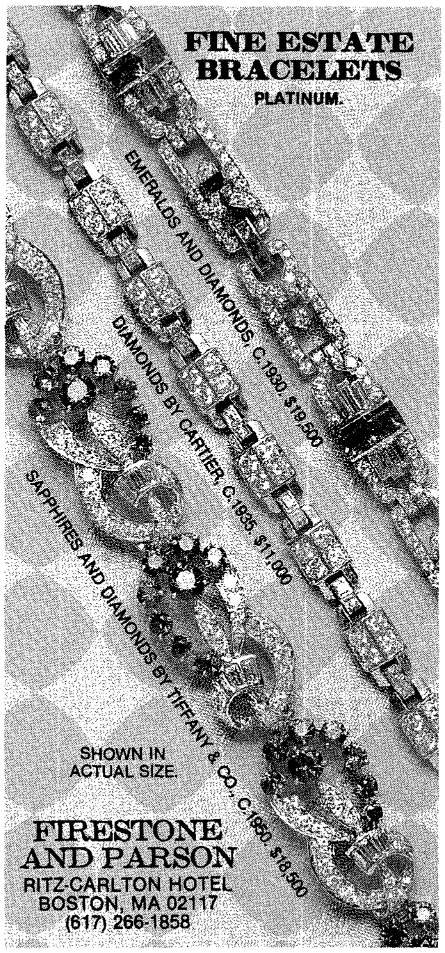
To his great credit, Ito has applied his truth principles impartially, even when doing so has hurt the prosecution. Indeed, Simpson's lawyers have picked up on Ito's predilection for arguments based on truth and from time to time have used his inclination to their own advantage. The most spectacular example came on February 23rd. That afternoon, Clark objected to an attempt by Cochran to use a videotape of the murder scene in cross-examining Detective Tom Lange. Clark said that the perspective of the camera created a misleading picture, and called Cochran's effort an attempt "to distort, confuse, and mislead the jury." But Cochran cleverly played the truth card in response. "In this courtroom, we've heard so many times how the People are the only ones seeking the truth, Your Honor," Cochran asserted. "We are the ones introducing the truth here. We are showing a videotape. . . . We know who is seeking the truth here." Ito allowed Cochran to use the tape.

Later that afternoon, Cochran asked Lange if he had heard whether Nicole's friend Faye Resnick had moved into Nicole's home shortly before the murders. (Cochran was apparently laying the groundwork for a claim that the murders might in some way be related to Resnick's admitted use of drugs.) At a heated sidebar conference, Clark said Cochran's question called for information that had been told to Lange by someone else. But Ito wanted to avoid the technical issue and cut to the chase. "Is that a disputed fact?" Ito asked Clark. "Do you dispute that Faye Resnick resided in June of '94 at that residence?" Though it is clear that Resnick briefly stayed with Nicole, Christopher Darden, the other prosecutor, exploded at the Judge. For one extraordinary moment, it appeared that Ito was going to hold Darden in contempt of court for his outburst. And, while the Judge ultimately took no action against Darden, he did allow Cochran to ask Lange about Resnick. His reasoning, it seems, was the same as that on the videotape issue: the jury should hear the truth.

But Ito's most important legal ruling in the case so far illuminated the full implications of his approach. The ruling came after the defense argued that the prosecution should not be allowed to introduce evidence of O. J. Simpson's history of domestic violence against his ex-wife. Such evidence, the defense contended, was unduly inflammatory and essentially irrelevant in a murder trial. The issue raised a tangle of political questions. Is it "liberal" to protect a defendant from accusations that do not necessarily relate to the case at hand? Is it "conservative" to allow the prosecution to show that the relationship between this husband and wife included emotional and physical abuse? Are the feminists who demanded that Ito admit the evidence liberals or conservatives? "Domestic violence is one of those issues that cut across political boundaries and illustrate just what a truth-based approach means," Amar says. "But the fact is it would have been wrong—it would have violated common sense—to deprive the jury of the history of this relationship before the murders."

That, in any event, appears to have been Ito's view. But he did not simply admit the domestic-violence evidence wholesale. In a carefully worded opinion, issued just a week before opening statements in the case, Ito divided the domestic-violence evidence into fifty-nine "alleged significant events or incidents of misconduct by the defendant." He did exclude some of the events, but he allowed the prosecution to present evidence of more than a dozen separate acts of emotional and physical violence by O.J. against Nicole in the course of their long and tempestuous relationship. This ruling allowed the jury to hear of Simpson's conviction, in 1989, for beating Nicole, and of Nicole's 911 call, in 1993, in which she begged for police assistance while O.J. bellowed at her in the background. The ruling transformed the prosecution's case from a rather dry and technical one based exclusively on circumstantial and scientific evidence into a melodrama of increasing domestic violence ending in death. Again, Ito found that if it happened, then the jury should be able to hear about it.

The Judge's preference for truth in packaging extended even to nomenclature. As Ito stated in his opinion, Simpson's defense team had asked him to prohibit the prosecution "from using such terms as 'battered wife,' 'battered spouse,' 'spousal abuse,' 'stalker,' and 'stalking' because they are unduly prejudicial, inflammatory, and not supported by the evidence." He dealt with this argument quickly. On the basis of what he had seen of the prosecution's evidence, Ito noted dryly, and chillingly, "such restriction is not warranted." ◆



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POSTSCRIPT

BRAVING THE ELEMENTS

The late poet James Merrill was a golden boy of all-American privilege whose chronicles of love and loss were a mirror for a generation.

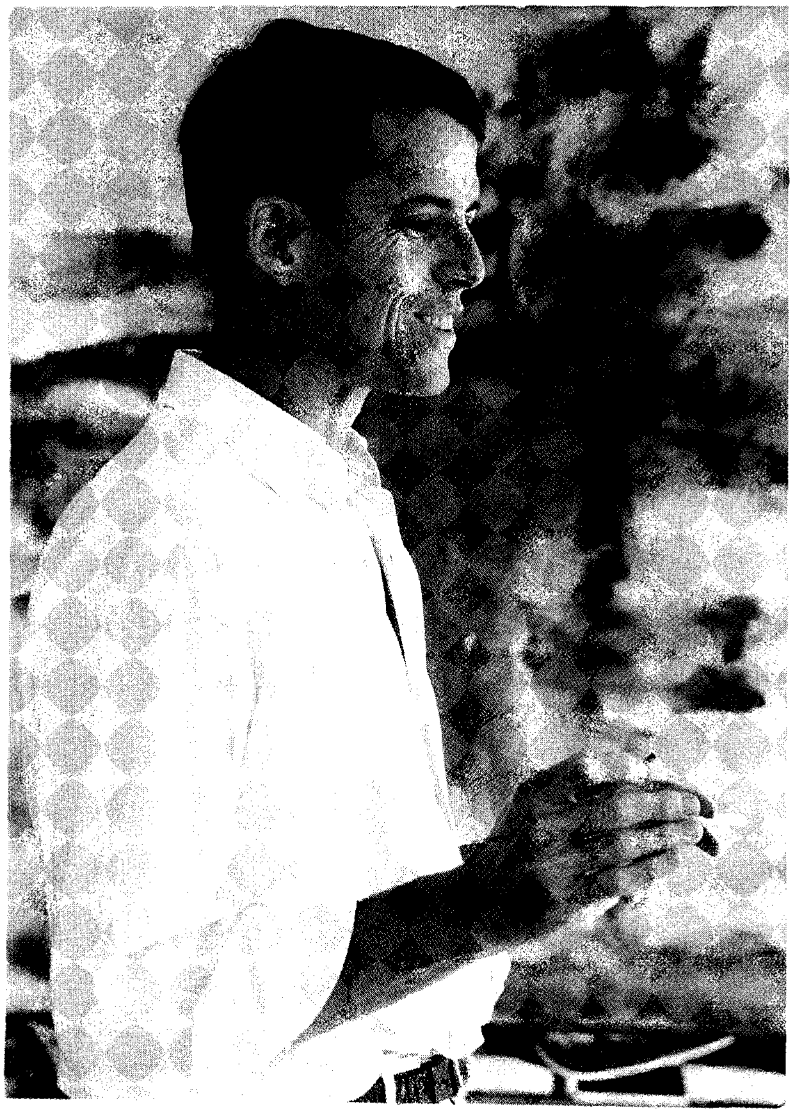
BY J. D. McCLATCHY

THE news that James Merrill had died last month in Arizona at the age of sixty-eight, of a sudden heart attack, caused a palpable shock in the literary world. Spontaneous tributes and readings sprang up all around the country. Disbelieving letters and phone calls crisscrossed the circle of professional writers. Not since a starry chapter closed in the nineteen-seventies with the deaths of W. H. Auden, Robert Lowell, and Elizabeth Bishop has the loss of an American poet been as momentous, or as widely acknowledged to be so.

That is in part because, however compelling Merrill's ambitions or demanding his methods, his readers always felt a sort of intimacy with him. For fifty years, the poet had used the details of his own life to shape a portrait that in turn mirrored back to us an image of our world and our moment. When his sixth book of poems, "Braving the Elements," appeared, in 1972, Helen Vendler's review in the *Times* struck early what has since come to be the dominant note in appraisals of Merrill: "The time eventually comes, in a good poet's career, when readers actively long for his books: to know that someone out there is writing down your century, your generation, your language, your life—under whatever terms of difference—makes you wish for news of yourself, for those authentic tidings of invisible things, as Wordsworth called them, that only come in the interpretation of life voiced by poetry."

For Merrill's funeral service, in Stonington, Connecticut, on a raw February afternoon, the little village church—its whitewashed interior suddenly looking rather Greek—was filled. A piping soprano sang "Bist du bei mir" to the plaintive accompaniment of a virginal, and Merrill's good friend the novelist Allan Gurganus delivered a brief eulogy. "Some people contain their grace," he said. "James dispersed his. It was a molecular nimbus he lived within, and he seemed, after nearly seven decades in there, largely unaware of its effervescent impact on the rest of us." Later, at the cemetery, where a mossy oblong of sod lay beside a tiny grave, friend after friend sprinkled a handful of dirt over the poet's ashes. One young poet, when it was his turn, also dropped into the grave a dime-store marble painted to resemble the globe.

FOR Merrill's friends, the shock has slowly subsided into the dull realization that there will be no more of his witty company. Yes, he was a great poet and knew he was meant to end up as books on a shelf. Those books—the last one, "A Scattering of Salts," is, as it happens, to be published this week—have long since confirmed his mastery: he knew more about the language of poetry than anyone else since Auden and used it to make poems that will remain part of anyone's definition of the art. But so, too, his conversation. He liked, as he once said, "English in its billiard-table sense—words that have been set spinning against their own gravity." At a large dinner party or on a casual stroll with an old acquaintance or a perfect stranger, he had an uncanny, almost anarchic habit of turning everything upside down. By his slight adjustment of perspective or realignment of a syllable, the dire became droll. He rarely relaxed his instinctive habit of reversing a truth or upending the mawkish, and his face loved to anticipate—with its pursed smile and



ROLLIE MCKENNA

Merrill in 1961. His "The Changing Light at Sandover" is, with the possible exception of Whitman's "Song of Myself," America's strangest and grandest poem.

arched brow—the pleasure his remark was about to give.

Last season, for instance, at a Met performance of "Otello," the Desdemona was in trouble long before her tragic end. Carol Vaness became ill during the opera and decided to withdraw. Her Russian cover, hastily done up in such a way as to make her quite a different woman from Vaness, took over the last act. After the performance, Merrill, ambling up the aisle, turned to a friend and shook his head with a rueful giddiness: "Poor Desdemona! She changed the color of her hair, but it didn't save her marriage."

The crack is characteristic in more ways than one. To begin with, he was at the opera, and nothing over the years had given him more pleasure or, at the start, had taught him more. He began going to the Met when he was eleven, and one of his best-known poems, "Matinees," describes its effect: "The point thereafter was to arrange for one's / Own chills and fever, passions and betrayals, / Chiefly in order to make song of them." Opera—its ecstasies and deceptions, its transcendent fires and icy grandeurs—is, above all, a stylized dramatization of our inner lives, our forbidden desires and repressed fears. It may seem surprising in a poet like Merrill, whose surfaces can be so elegant and elusive, but center stage in his work is passion. However his words may work to heighten and refine it, the urgency of the heart's desires is his constant subject.

That Merrill would joke not about Desdemona's murder but about her failed marriage also points to a distant event that had come to shape his imagination. At about the time he starting going to the opera, his parents separated. A bitter divorce trial followed, and, because Merrill's father was one of the most powerful financiers in America—a co-founder of the great brokerage house of Merrill, Lynch—the story was national news. One tabloid even ran a photograph of young James with the caption "PAWN IN PARENTS' FIGHT." Again and again in the course of his career, Merrill revisited the scene, and nowhere more memorably than in his sequence of sonnets called "The Broken Home." Thirty years after the fact, the poem manages a knowing shrug: "Always that same old story— / Father Time and Mother Earth, / A marriage on the rocks." But the poem's impulse here to mythologize the trauma is part of a larger scheme. It is as if the divorce represented Merrill's own split personality. As much his father's son as his mother's boy, he had a temperament that by turns revealed what we may as well call paternal and maternal sides. He was drawn equally to the rational and the fanciful, the passionate and the ironic, America and Europe. And, from the very beginning, his ambition as a poet was—like the child attempting to reconcile his warring parents—to harmonize those two sides of his life. More often than not, he preferred to remain of two minds about all matters. And the energy spent exploring these divisions and doublings, all the obsessions and inventions of his work, from the delicacies of metaphor on to the creation of an entire cosmogony, fuelled a career as remarkable as any in American literary history.

As children, most of us fantasize a glamorous alternative: our parents are royal and rich, we live in a palace, we are adored and powerful. But if those happen to be the *facts* of your life instead of your fantasies? Merrill's parents had a brownstone on West Eleventh Street and a stately Stanford White pile in Southampton—The Orchard—with a dozen bedrooms, with conservatories and rose arbors, cooks and chauffeurs. In his 1957 roman à clef, "The Seraglio," Merrill portrays his father in his later years as a sort of pasha, surrounded by wife, ex-wives, mistresses, nurses, and flatterers—a man who loved his wives deeply but cheerlessly while counting on other women for companionship and fun. He was a man whose face "would have made the fortune of any actor. Frank, earnest, noble in repose, it was kept from plain tiresome fineness by being always on the verge of some unlikely humor, mischief or doltishness or greed." Merrill's mother, Hellen Ingram, was Charles Merrill's second wife, a Jacksonville beauty who had once been a newspaper reporter, and she kept close tabs on her son. It's almost natural that Merrill's childhood fantasies weren't the usual ones. If his ballad "Days of 1935" is a fair account of them, he imagined himself kidnapped, like the Lindbergh baby, and carried off to some shabby hideout by a gangster and his moll, with whose cheap looks—her rosebud chewing gum, his sallow, lantern-jawed menace—he falls in love, and from whose violent ways he longs not to be ransomed.

In a 1982 *Paris Review* interview, he said, "It strikes me now maybe that during much of my childhood I found it difficult to *believe* in the way my parents lived. They seemed so utterly taken up with engagements, obligations, ceremonies—every child must feel that, to some extent, about the grown-ups in his life." In fact, like most childhoods, his was lonely. He craved affection, and spent most of his time with a beloved governess, reading up on the Norse myths or devising plots to present in his marionette theatre. The loneliness—perhaps a necessary condition for any poet's working life—and a need to charm run right through his work. By the time he was eight, he was writing poems. By the time he was at Lawrenceville, he meant to make a career of it and told his father so. Charles Merrill had a volume of the boy's early poems and stories—called "Jim's Book"—privately printed, to the young author's immediate delight and future chagrin. Later, distressed by his son's determination, Charles nonetheless took a businessman's approach. He secretly sent his son's fledgling work to several "experts," including the president of Amherst, and asked for their frank opinion. When they all agreed on a precocious talent, the patriarch was overheard to say proudly that he would rather have a poet for a son than a third-rate polo player.

Recently, Merrill had begun to notice in his shaving mirror each morning how much he had come to resemble his father: "a face no longer / sought in dreams but worn as my own" is how one poem puts it. He had never thought to look for that face earlier, since the young need always to consider themselves unique. In his memoir "A Different Person," published two years ago, he remembers looking at himself in 1950:

> From the mirror stares inquiringly a slim person neither tall nor short, in a made-to-order suit of sandy covert cloth and a bow-tie. My bespectacled face is so young and unstretched that only by concentration do the lips close over two glinting chipmunk teeth. My hair, dark with fair highlights, is close-cropped. I have brown eyes, an unexceptionable nose, a good jaw. My brow wrinkles when I am sad or worried, as now.

> Not that what I see dismays me. Until recently I've been an overweight, untidy adolescent; now my image in the glass is the best I can hope for. Something, however, tells me that time will do little to improve it. The outward bloom of youth upon my features will fade long before the budlike spirit behind them opens—if ever it does. It is inside that I need to change. To this end I hope very diffidently to get away from the kind of poetry I've been writing.

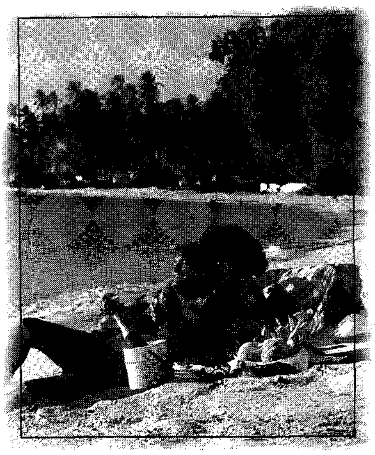
The kind of poetry he was writing then—his "First Poems" appeared in 1951—was very much of its time. The aloof, lapidary glamour of the poems, their dissolves and emblems were meant both to disguise feelings only dimly known and to declare his allegiance to a line of poets that could be traced from Wallace Stevens back to the French Symbolists. But before long he had written a novel and had a couple of plays produced Off Broadway, and from both experiences he had learned to write a more fluent and inflected line, often coaxed by narrative.

In 1954, Merrill decided to abandon New York City. He moved, with his companion, David Jackson, to Stonington, a small coastal village—half fishing fleet, half Yankee clapboard—that a friend had suggested might remind him of a Mediterranean port. He and Jackson bought a house; they had a brass bed, a record player, a rowboat, a table and two chairs to work on, and no telephone. He loved the light glinting on Long Island Sound, and the cozy, settled routines of village life; the town, he said, was "full of clever wrinkled semi-famous people whom by the end of our second season we couldn't live without." In 1959, he and Jackson made another move—to Athens. They soon bought a house there, too, and for the next two decades spent half of each year in Greece.

Both moves were, in a sense, strategic withdrawals. Like his friend Elizabeth Bishop, Merrill did what he could to avoid having to lead a Literary Life. Stonington's bright calm began to give his work a more domestic focus. In the collection named for his address, "Water Street" (1962), there is a poem that speaks of his "dull need to make some kind of house / Out of the life lived, out of the love spent." Always aware that the word "stanza" is Italian for "room," Merrill put together poems that would shelter his memories. Increasingly, his poems were autobiographical, reaching back to his childhood or puzzling over some passing event or involvement. He eventually described his poems as "chronicles of love and loss," and that term aptly stresses his sense of a life lived and understood over time, and links his two recurrent themes. From Merrill's college days on, his favorite writer had been Proust, for whom the only true paradise was a lost paradise. For both writers, love is not fully itself until it is lost, until it becomes memory, becomes art.

If the familiarities of Stonington afforded both distance and security, Greece gave him something else. Here was a landscape of ravishing ruggedness, a culture of exotic simplicities. Better still, a language—he quickly mastered it—in which his accent wouldn't at once betray his class. He loved the anonymity it gave him; he loved the very sound of it: "kaló-kakó, cockatoo-raucous / Coastline of white printless coves / Already strewn with offbeat echolalia."

The poems set in Greece, vivid with local color, are the highlight of his two subsequent books—"Nights and Days" (1966) and "The Fire Screen" (1969). Landscapes as different as New Mexico, Rome, and Key West would later figure in his work as well. Merrill was a poet who looked out at a scene or around a room for prompting. "I always find when I don't like a poem I'm writing, I don't look any more into the human components," he told an interviewer. "I look more to the *setting*—a room, the objects in it." What was in front of his eyes would reveal what was in his mind. It was a quality he especially admired in the poems of Eugenio Montale—the way their "ladles and love letters, their furniture and pets" led finally deep into a labyrinth of feeling. The rooms of Merrill's Stonington house, which gave the impression of a *boutique fantasque*, were themselves an image of his inner life: a clutter of beloved totems. An immense Victorian mirror would reflect masterpiece and tchotchke, piles of books on the horsehair divan, a glass bowl filled with glass globes, bat-motif wallpaper, a Maxfield Parrish, a Tanagra figurine, a snapshot of his goddaughter, a Mogul miniature, a wooden nickel, cacti and shells, a Meissen plate, a lacquered Japanese trav-



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THE MAD SCENE

Again last night I dreamed the dream called Laundry.
In it, the sheets and towels of a life we were going to share,
The milk-stiff bibs, the shroud, each rag to be ever
Trampled or soiled, bled on or groped for blindly,
Came swooning out of an enormous willow hamper
Onto moon-marbly boards. We had just met. I watched
From outer darkness. I had dressed myself in clothes
Of a new fiber that never stains or wrinkles, never
Wears thin. The opera house sparkled with tiers
And tiers of eyes, like mine enlarged by belladonna,
Trained inward. There I saw the cloud-clot, gust by gust,
Form, and the lightning bite, and the roan mane unloosen.
Fingers were running in panic over the flute's nine gates.
Why did I flinch? I loved you. And in the downpour laughed
To have us wrung white, gnarled together, one
Topmost mordent of wisteria,
As the lean tree burst into grief.

—James Merrill
(1962)

elling box, a windup toy bird, the upheld hand of a Buddha.

A couple of years ago, Allan Gurganus wrote to Merrill urging him to reread Tolstoy's novella "Family Happiness." The poet dutifully looked for it but could find it only in French, in one of the worn Pléïade editions he kept by his bed. When he opened to "Le Bonheur Conjugal," out fluttered a piece of paper on which, twenty years earlier, he had typed a stanza from Byron's poem "Beppo"—lines that he imagined at the time described a person he might grow to resemble:

Then he was faithful, too, as well as amorous,
  So that no sort of female could complain,
Although they're now and then a little clamorous;
  He never put the pretty souls in pain;
His heart was one of those which most enamour us,
  Wax to receive and marble to retain:
He was a lover of the good old school,
Who still become more constant as they cool.

Rather like his father, Merrill was a lover of the good old school. He'd found his own *bonheur conjugal* in 1953 with David Jackson. Jackson could play the piano, write a story, dash off a watercolor; he was ebullient, daring, funny, irresistible. Over their years together, strains in their relationship were sometimes apparent. But they stayed together—if, lately, at a certain distance from each other. It was as if Merrill were determined to keep for himself the kind of relationship his parents had thrown away. He was constant to his other lovers, as well. He'd had affairs before he met Jackson, and several afterward. (For the last dozen years, he was devoted to a young actor, Peter Hooten.) He had a way of turning each affair not only into an abiding friendship but into poetry. He wrote some of the most beautiful love poems of this century. He relished Borges's description of love as "a religion with a fallible god," and few poets have looked on love with such a vulnerable and wary eye:

Where I hid my face, your touch, quick, merciful,
Blindfolded me. A god breathed from my lips.
If that was illusion, I wanted it to last long;
To dwell, for its daily pittance, with us there,
Cleaning and watering, sighing with love or pain.
I hoped it would climb when it needed to the heights
Even of degradation, as I for one
Seemed, those days, to be always climbing
Into a world of wild
Flowers, feasting, tears—or was I falling, legs
Buckling, heights, depths,
Into a pool of each night's rain?
But you were everywhere beside me, masked,
As who was not, in laughter, pain, and love.

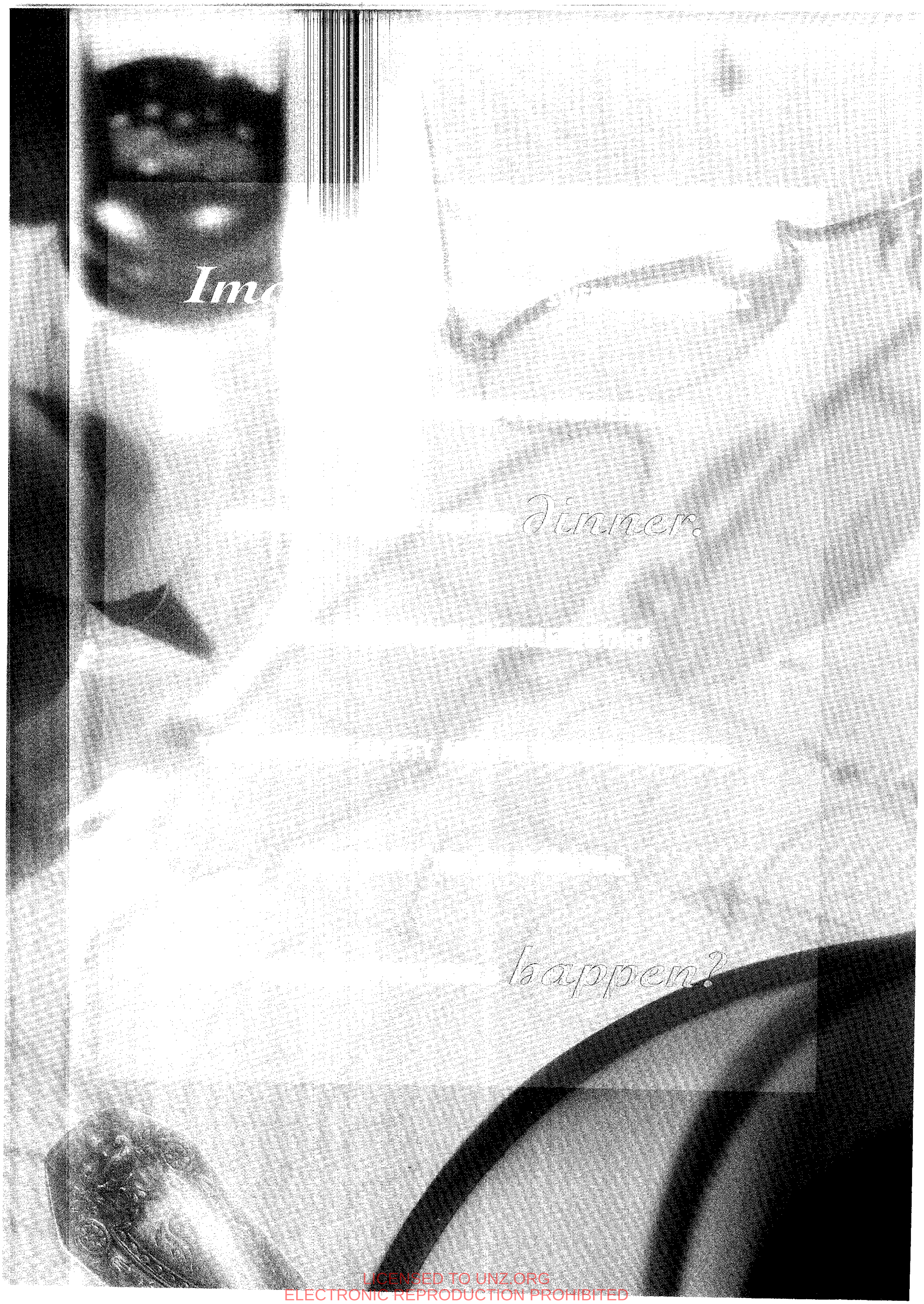
Merrill's sexuality was like a drop of dye let fall into a glass of water: it is subdued but suffuses everything. He wrote openly and seriously about homosexual love long before that was fashionable. In his memoir he writes, "As in the classic account of Sarah Bernhardt descending a spiral staircase—she stood still and *it* revolved around her—my good fortune was to stay in one place while the closet simply disintegrated."

When I met Merrill, he was forty-six and had earned his first full measure of fame. "Nights and Days" had won the 1967 National Book Award, whose judges (W. H. Auden, James Dickey, and Howard Nemerov) singled out "his insistence on taking the kind of tough, poetic chances which make the difference between esthetic success or failure." And he had just published "Braving the Elements," whose exquisite austerities mark a kind of extreme in his work. Dense and rapturous, the poems are set amid the hazards of history and romance. His narrative skills turn out Chekhovian vignettes like "After the Fire" or "Days of 1971," where the end of an affair helps him to a wistful self-knowledge:

"Proust's Law" (are you listening?) is two-fold:
a) What least thing our self-love longs for most
Others instinctively withhold;

b) Only when time has slain desire
Is his wish granted to a smiling ghost
Neither harmed nor warmed, now, by the fire.

When "Braving the Elements" was awarded the 1973 Bollingen Prize, Merrill was the subject of a *Times* editorial attacking those who continue to "reward poetry that is literary, private, traditional." That has been a sentiment, a peculiarly American fear of the Fancy, that other readers have shared. Some early critics condescended to his work by calling it "bejewelled." Ironically, their contemptuous dismissal hinted at a larger truth. From the start, but nowhere more than in this book, Merrill took his bearings from the four elements—earth, air, fire, water—and in many of his poems the jewel is their embodiment. Crystal prism or emerald brooch, waterfall or geode, dragonfly or planet, or whatever other brilliant lens he chose, it was to inspect more carefully the natural world's wonders. He once told a young writer, "It's not the precious but the semi-precious one has to resist." And, like most strong poets, he seemed largely indifferent to his critics. He knew his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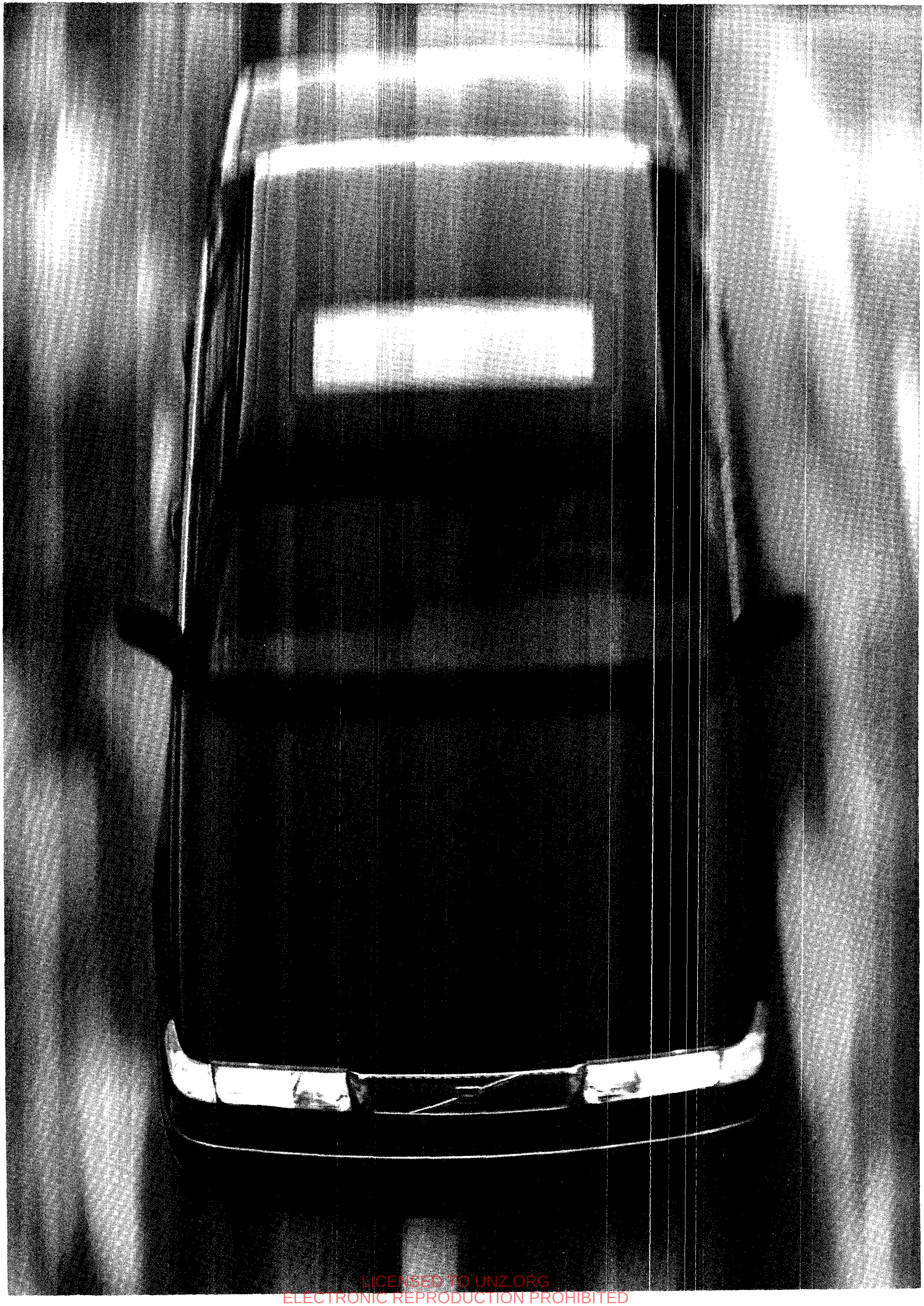

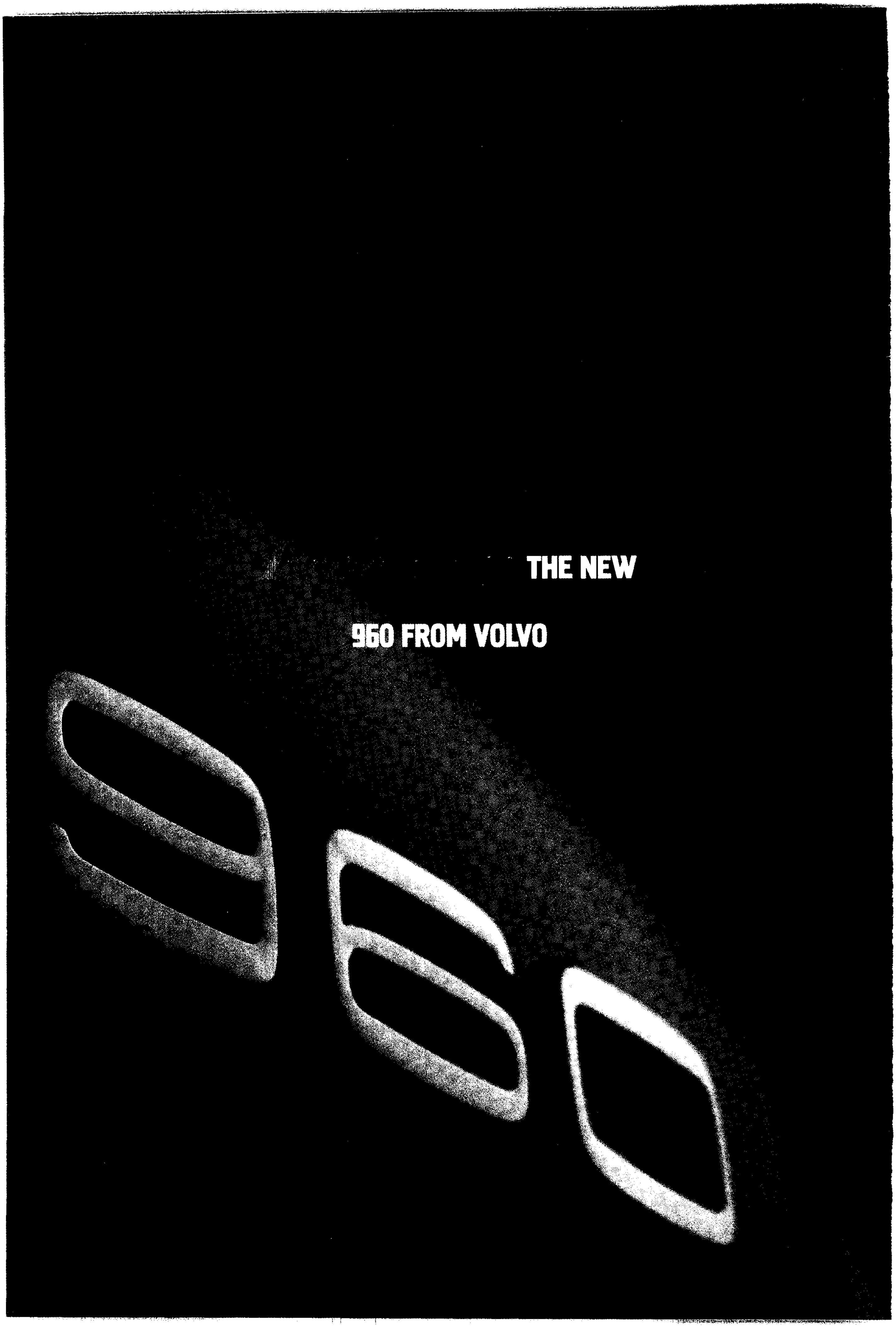
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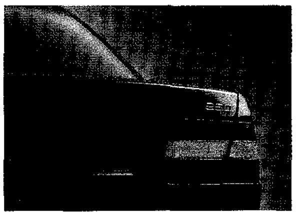

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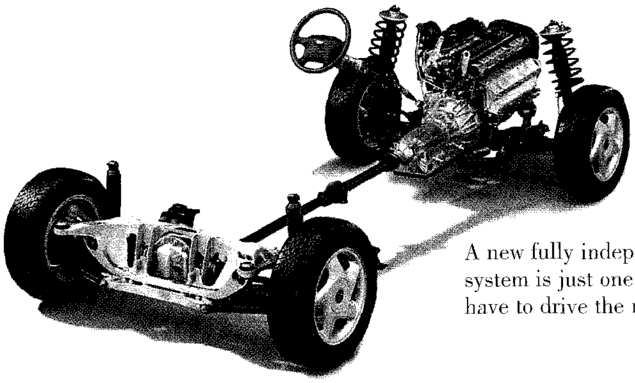

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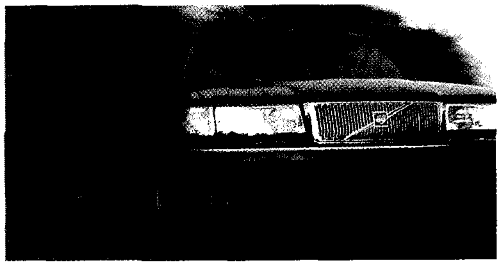

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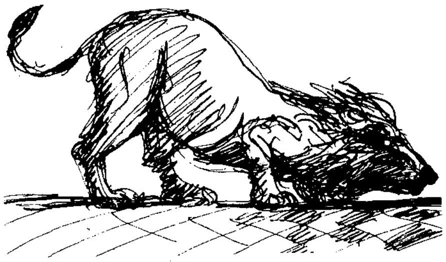
worth, and disdained the lust for celebrity. "Think what one has to *do* to get a mass audience," he once noted wryly to his friend the critic David Kalstone. "I'd rather have one perfect reader. Why dynamite the pond in order to catch that single silver carp? Better to find a bait that only the carp will take."

HE was a poet who trusted language to tell him what anything means. Rhyme, wordplay, paradox only help reveal the hidden wish of words. Indeed, the O.E.D. is the collective unconscious of English speakers, he would say, for all our ideas and feelings are to be found there, in the endless recombinations of our words. He was himself rather shy of ideas in poems. "Shaped by ideas like everyone else, I nevertheless avert my eyes from them," he joked, "as from the sight of a nude grandparent, not presentable, indeed taboo, until robed in images." Those images are an astonishment. He notes a hotel's "strange bed, whose recurrent dream we are," or describes a plot of zinnias as "pine cones in drag," or Kufic script as "all trigger tail and gold vowel-sac." His lines are animated with colloquial idiom and quicksilver wit. Their perfection of tone is made to seem offhanded, their weight of allusion and symbol is deftly balanced. If the surfaces of his poems sometimes seemed difficult, it may have been because for most of his career other poets were loudly trumpeting the virtues of the plain style. For his part, Merrill would say that the natural word order isn't "See Jane run." The more *natural* way to put it is actually more complex: "Where on earth can that child be racing off to? Why, it's little—you know, the neighbor's brat—Jane!" So, too, the syntax of his poems darts and capers. The effect on a reader can be vertiginous. The long feather boa of some intellectually complex sentence may suddenly give way to a tank-top phrase. Merrill would have agreed with George Balanchine, who once said that the true figure for the artist should be the gardener or the chef: you love everything because you need everything.

By the mid-seventies, his poems were growing longer. He attributed that change to "middle-age spread." But even he was surprised by the project that occupied him for seven years, from 1974 until 1980. In fact, it was a project that preëmpted him. Ever since moving to Stonington, he and David Jackson had, on spare evenings, sat down at a homemade Ouija board and chatted with the great dead. No sooner did Merrill write up these encounters, in the volume "Divine Comedies," which won him the 1976 Pulitzer Prize, than the spirits demanded that he attend to more rigorous lessons they would give him. "Don't you think there comes a time when everyone, not just a poet, wants to get beyond the self?" Merrill said in an interview. "To reach, if you like, the 'god' within you? The board, in however clumsy or absurd a way, allows for precisely that. Or if it's still *yourself* that you're drawing upon, then that self is much stranger and freer and more farseeing than the one you thought you knew." Resisting the impulse to be either wholly skeptical or merely credulous, Merrill sat for the lessons. The curriculum ranged from subatomic particles to cosmic forces, and the cast included Akhenaton, Pythagoras, Montezuma, T. S. Eliot, Maria Callas, bats and unicorns, scientists and neighbors, God Biology and Mother Nature. In his epic account of it all, the poet managed to make the otherworldly revelations into a very human drama of acceptance, resistance, and ambivalence. And by the time he had gathered all seventeen thousand lines of his adventure into a single volume, "The Changing Light at Sandover" (1982), he had written what is—with the possible exception of Whitman's "Song of Myself"—the strangest and grandest American poem ever: at once eerie, hilarious, and heartbreaking.

"A Scattering of Salts" (to call it his last book instead of his latest sticks in my throat) is a wonderful anthology of Merrill's characteristic strengths as a poet. There are portraits and elegies, sonnets and free-verse riffs, high style and slang. There are pungent, elliptical little lyrics and the longer, loping narratives that were his specialty. In one he describes "family week" at a dude-ranch rehab center he is visiting to be with a friend, who has sought treatment there.



The poet tries to adjust to the New Age therapies:

This wide-angle moonscape, lawns and pool,
Patients sharing pain like fudge from home—
As if these were the essentials,

As if a month at what it invites us to think
Is little more than a fat farm for Anorexics,
Substance Abusers, Love & Relationship
    Addicts
Could help *you*, light of my life, when even
    your shrink . . .

The message, then? That costly folderol,
Underwear made to order in Vienna,
Who needs it! Let the soul hang out
At Benetton—stone-washed, one size fits all.

It ends with a haunting, lovelorn speculation that blends the newest jargon with one of poetry's oldest images:

And if the old patterns recur?
Ask how the co-dependent moon, another
    night,
Feels when the light drains wholly from her
    face.
Ask what that cold comfort means to her.

Cozy chats over the Ouija board acknowledge death as an event but not as a fact. They might even be said to represent at some level a denial of death. But the three collections that Merrill published during the past decade take a more realistic look at mortality. This final book has a nearly Yeatsian vigor in the face of the end. What Merrill sees on the microscope slide is everything we dread. "Dread? It crows for joy in the manger. / Joy? The tree sparkles on which it will die."

THE earnest young poet I was in 1972 found the James Merrill who had kindly invited me to dinner one spring night dauntingly sophisticated. His features were faintly elfin, and his voice—a soft, cultivated baritone—drew one instinctively toward its flickering brightness. He had read everything (I found out later that in his twenties he had taken one winter to read all of Dickens, another for Balzac) but skated past any ponderous discussion of literature—though he could quote at will whole swatches of Baudelaire or Da Ponte or Cole Porter. He never played The Poet in company but felt himself "more like a doctor at a dinner party, just another guest until his hostess slumps to the floor or his little beeper goes off." He rarely read a newspaper and didn't vote, yet was scornfully eloquent about the technocracy's myopic bureaucrats and "their sad knowledge, their fingertip control." He worked at his desk every day, and, even

KOI

Snow today, the first in seven years,
As major a blizzard as the mildness here can muster.
Big slow skydiving flakes, their floating filigrees
Aspiring to come back as a field of Queen Anne's lace.

Then it is over, and the terrain resumes its menace.
Coyotes patrol it, watchful for a small
Privileged dog to steal. Premonitions! Whole nights
Preliving the yelp of pain and disbelief

As we helplessly watch our Cosmo borne struggling off.
We keep him on a stout red leash, but still. . . .
Behind these garden walls it's safe. Birds, olive trees,
A rectangular pool of koi. Twin to the urban

Gempool south of us. Last night again: a moon,
Big stars, white clouds—no, wait, clouds colorized
To the exact tint of the white patches on the koi. A white
Ever so faintly suffused by blood and gold.

And from the clouds, or far beyond them, at intervals
Our upturned faces receive a mild pinprick of dew.
Feel the world drop away it whispers. *Seven years more*
Breathes the melting snow. To which the koi can only

Reply *Carpe diem.* Next morning to their skylight comes a human
Silhouette edged by radiance, and they cluster to be fed.
Hold a fistful of pellets underwater, your hand will be kissed
By the tenderest mouths. It's too much: our "Lindbergh puppy"

Is barking—he's losing his footing—he's fallen in!

—JAMES MERRILL
(January, 1995)

to the extent that he lived for pleasure, he lived rather simply. If he meant to be a dandy in his dress, the results were more often merely eccentric. Old Auden wore carpet slippers to the opera. You could spot Merrill there in mauve Birkenstocks over lime-green socks, neatly pressed corduroys with a Navajo belt buckle, a shirt from the Gap, a Venetian bow tie, a loden cape, and a baseball cap.

His chief pleasure was friendship. Over the years, his friends ranged from Alice Toklas and Maya Deren to Richard Wilbur and Alison Lurie. To each he was tender and loyal. His friends, in turn, responded in such coin as they happened to have in their pockets. In 1968, when Stephen Yenser sent him a fervently used book—a palm-size, velvet-covered, dog-eared copy of "The Rubáiyat of Omar Khayyám," a poem Merrill adored—the poet responded in kind:

Fortunate those who back from a brief trip,
To equinoctial storms and scholarship,
Unwrap, first thing, a present from a friend,
And into Omar's honeyed pages dip.

Richard Howard once noted that the art of living was one of Merrill's unrivalled talents. "What one wants in this world," Merrill wrote, "isn't so much to 'live' as to . . . *be* lived, to be used by life for its own purposes. What has one to give but oneself?" It was always to Merrill that his friends turned when they needed advice. Here, for instance, is part of a 1973 letter he sent me from Greece. I seem then to have been in the throes of some now forgotten crisis of the heart. How sweetly he edged up to my worries. He began by describing the crowded summer in Athens, and his being content to stay blithely above it. Then he expanded from details to his theme:

> The iron gates of life have seldom seen such traffic, to judge from the confused rumor that reaches us here in the shade of the pearly ones. The real absurdity, you will say (and I'll agree, it's all so novel), is to feel in one's bones how utterly a boundary has been crossed. Here one is in Later Life, and it's perfectly pleasant really, not for a moment that garden of cactus and sour grapes I'd always assumed it *must* be. Oh dear, this sort of thing is probably just what you mean by my being "recessed" into myself. But it's odd. I mean, the times of greatest recession into the self have always been, for me, times of helpless suffering, such as you're going through; when there's no escape from the self. Perhaps any circumstance, any frame of mind, content, pain, trust, distrust, is a niche that limits visibility—for both the occupant and the onlooker? I read your last letter, in any case, with pangs of recognition. There's no special comfort, is there? in being understood at times like these. One is so mortified by one's predicament, and at the same moment so curiously proud of its ramifications. You won't be ready yet to *like* the fact of belonging to a very large group who've all had—allowing for particular differences—the same general experience. Later on, when your sense of humor and proportion returns, that fact ought rather to please you: to have so shared in the—or at least *a*—human condition. Write me as much or as little about it as you see fit. As you say, the particulars should probably be saved for the couch. Don't waste time feeling superior to your doctor. You are no doubt cleverer and more presentable than he is, but (with any luck) he knows his business, and the shoes he is making for you will last and last.

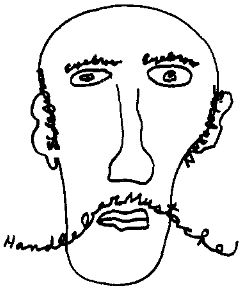
Of course, he gave a great deal more than advice to his friends. He was a soft touch, and had learned the difficult art of giving money away gracefully. By a friend's staggering medical bill or the down payment on a house, appeals from ballet companies or animal shelters, stories of neglected old poets on the skids or a young painter who needed equipment his sympathy was easily sparked. In 1956, he used a portion of his inheritance to establish the Ingram Merrill Foundation, whose board of directors was empowered to award grants to writers and artists. Over the years, hundreds of people were helped. The edge was given to the promising beginner.

What Merrill couldn't give away was the stigma that came with his wealth and privilege. Epicurus famously said that riches don't alleviate, only change, one's troubles. The fortune that gave Merrill the chance both to distance himself from the family who made it and to pursue an odd, intricate career was, I'd guess, a nagging source of embarrassment for him and may have occasioned, in turn, his aversion to grand hotels and restaurants, his recycled razor blades and Spartan diet. He used, long ago, to confuse his companions by declaring, "Thank goodness I come from poor parents." He meant that his parents' values had been formed—by the example of *their* parents, who were hardworking and middle-class—before they had money. In a sense, his own values were old-fashioned. What sustained Merrill was dedication to his calling, a high ambition, and a deeply moral purpose. If we give equal weight to each word, then this definition of a poet he once offered sums him up: "a man choosing the words he lives by."

WHEN Merrill's ashes were sent back to be buried in Stonington, a box of papers came, too. Peter Hooten had gathered up poems and drafts from the poet's desk. Among them was a poem called "Koi." Behind the house he and Hooten had been renting in Tucson for the winter was a small ornamental pool of koi, the Japanese carp. The poem—the last he finished, a couple of weeks before he died—is about those fish and his little Jack Russell terrier, Cosmo. Of course, it wasn't written *as* a last poem, but circumstances give it a special poignancy.

Also sent home was his notebook. It is open now on my desk. He'd kept a series of notebooks over the years, their entries irregular, often fragmentary. Things overheard or undergone. Dreams, lists, lines. An image or anagram. The writing—even the handwriting—is swift and elegant. But the last page of this notebook is nearly indecipherable. Suddenly, at the end, you can *see* the difficulty he was having: the script is blurred, and that may be because he had lost his glasses. His breathing, too, was labored. On Friday, he'd been admitted to the hospital with a bout of acute pancreatitis. I spoke with him by telephone on Sunday, the night before he died, and asked about his breathing. He said that, though he'd been given oxygen, the doctors were not unduly concerned. The rest of the conversation was banter and gossip and plans for the future: a cataract operation, the new "Pelléas" at the Met. But his notebook tells another, more anxious story. The last page is dated "5.ii.95," the day before his death. There are two dozen lines, sketches for a poem to be titled "The Next to Last Scene." Typically, it starts by looking around the hospital room, and opens with what in retrospect seems an eerie line: "A room with every last convenience." It glances at TV set, cassette player, smiling lover. He would often, when drafting a poem, fill out the end of a line, knowing where he wanted to go but not exactly how he would get there. He'd done so here. I can make out "to see the other through." And then, the very last thing he wrote, "To set the other free."

To see the other through. To set the other free. Who or what is this "other"? The longer I gaze at the page, the more resonant these phrases become. Is it everything beyond and beloved by the self: the man in his life, the world's abundance, the ideal reader? Or all that burdens the soul, distracts the heart? Perhaps the psyche? Even the imagination? The impulse of Merrill's poems all along was both to brave the elements and to release them. Some poets try a change of style to force a change in their work. Merrill was a poet who instead sought fresh experience—a new landscape, a new lover—in order to abide by unexpected demands. At the same time, he sought to release, as if from a spell, the textures and colors of objects, the inner life of our arrangements, the hidden relationships among motives and emotions, the secrets of childhood and the energies of the unconscious.



It is still intolerable to think that there will be no more of his resplendent, pungent, mercurial, wise poems; that their author is like the mirror ceremonially broken at the end of "Sandover," "giving up its whole / Lifetime of images." James Merrill gave his lifetime to language, and to the way its hard truths and mysterious graces come to constitute our lives. Only a few poets in each generation—and Merrill was preëminent in his—can use language to make a style, and style to make a whole world of flesh and spirit, a world as momentous as the heart's upheavals and heaven's order, or as casual as a dime-store marble. ♦

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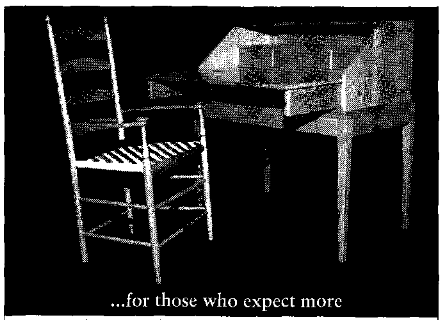

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DEPT. OF DISPUTATION

THE SPOILS OF VICTIMHOOD

The case against the case against affirmative action.

BY MICHAEL KINSLEY

AFFIRMATIVE action is one of those controversies, like abortion, in which opponents have the advantage of moral clarity. They are defending a seemingly absolute principle, while supporters are defending something much more ambiguous.

If you believe that human life begins at the moment of conception, abortion is murder, plain and simple. The opposing principle—that a woman has the right to "control her own body"—can't possibly be so absolute. (It doesn't give the right to kill your Siamese twin, for example.) Few abortion opponents actually carry their morally clear principle to its logical conclusion: that women who procure abortions should be prosecuted for murder—and, in death-penalty states, executed. But the seeming moral clarity is a great rhetorical plus.

In the case of affirmative action, opponents have the further advantage that the morally clear principle they are defending is one we all profess to share. We don't all agree that human life begins at conception, but we do all agree—or, at least, fear to disagree—that the United States ought to be a society of "color-blind equal opportunity" (henceforth "C.B.E.O."). We all "oppose on principle any counting, discriminating or allocating by race" (as one conservative columnist recently stated the anti-affirmative-action credo)—or, at least, we would like to do so. When opponents of affirmative action quote Martin Luther King, Jr., about judging people by the content of their character, not the color of their skin, who can object? You can argue about the reality, but you won't get far by challenging the ideal.

Opposition to affirmative action has a second great advantage in today's political culture: it feeds that powerful hunger for the moral prestige and political spoils of victimhood. It gives white males whining rights in the victimization bazaar, just like minorities and women. This also is an advantage not shared by opposition to abortion, which—agree with it or not—is selfless. Right-to-lifers are out to protect the interests of what they see as a powerless other person. Arguments against affirmative action, by contrast, offer a moral gloss for self-interest, which is always appealing. And the appeal cuts across economic and cultural lines. It tempts lower-middle-class workers concerned about their stagnant incomes and job security. It tempts yuppie professionals concerned about their promotions at work and their kids' college admissions. It tempts intellectuals concerned about their tenure. Republicans have decided, with almost sadistic delight, to make affirmative action their "wedge" issue for 1996—the issue that will pry various voting blocs away from the Democratic Party for good. Democrats are struck dumb with terror, or reduced to pathetically disingenuous denials that affirmative action violates the sacred C.B.E.O. principle.

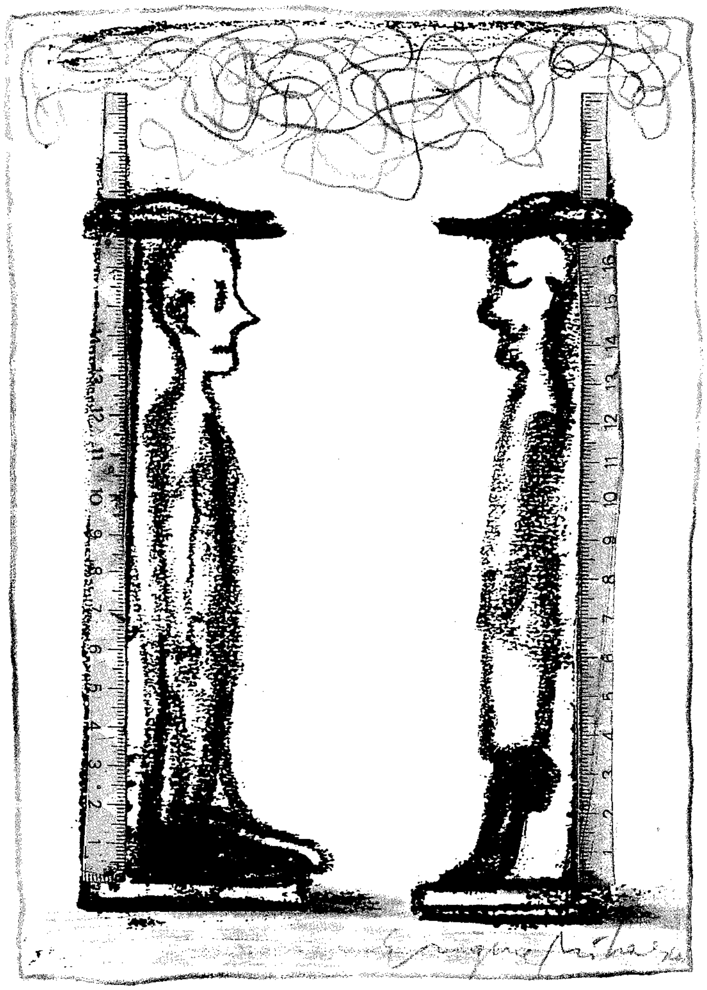
There's plenty to be cynical about in the current campaign against affirmative action. Conservatives, who ordinarily sneer at victim chic, embrace it in this case. Today's sanctimonious calls for color-blind equal opportunity for the benefit of whites come primarily from political elements that opposed the principle when it was enshrined, in the nineteen-fifties and sixties, to help blacks. (Republicans as moderate as George Bush were against the 1964 Civil Rights Act.) And even today much of the political power of anti-affirmative-action rhetoric is based on its appeal to emotions that are anything but color-blind. But all that is mere irony. Most affirmative-action opponents are not racists. The issue inflames emotions that are understandable, if not logical.

Especially in our sound-bite-and-spin political culture, it is hard for logic to prevail over emotion. You cannot trump a simple and ringing principle like C.B.E.O. with "Wait a minute—it's more complicated than that." But in the case of affirmative action it *is* more complicated than that. Even as an aspiration, let alone as a description of the United States right now, "color-blind equal opportunity" is full of logical problems—problems so severe that they make any self-righteous anathema on affirmative action nonsensical.

OPPONENTS of affirmative action have a potted history and a potted analysis that go together. The potted history is that the civil-rights movement was good through about 1964, when it pushed to eliminate discrimination against blacks, and went bad after about 1969, when it started pushing for discrimination against whites. The period 1964-69 was an alleged golden age of near-unanimous agreement that there should be no discrimination either way. The potted analysis is that there is a simple spectrum of discrimination, with a zero point in the middle—the C.B.E.O. point—where discrimination against blacks stops and discrimination against whites begins. But it is not possible either historically or analytically to draw a sharp distinction between "good" civil rights and "bad" affirmative action. The two are entwined.

We needn't dwell on the obvious and boring fact that there is still plenty of racism and discrimination of the traditional white-on-black sort, which is a significant handicap to blacks trying to make it in American society. In 1990, the Urban Institute sent out young blacks and young whites with equivalent résumés and references, and who had been trained to behave identically, to apply for entry-level jobs. The whites did substantially better. You're not surprised, are you? Although affirmative action of course gives blacks an advantage in specific situations, a black face is still a net minus in the climb up the American greasy pole.

Then, there's the equally obvious fact that the typical black American does *not* run the race of life with "equal opportunity" at the starting gate. Most blacks are at a disadvantage that begins with prenatal nutrition and runs through education to almost every other factor in career success. It hardly matters whether this disadvantage is due to the legacy of past racism or the failures of the Great Society, or whatever. The fact remains.



Indeed, leave aside the racial issue and consider the alleged principle of "equal opportunity" for a moment. It is an odd one. We all pay lip service to it, but in many respects it is not even accepted, let alone realized. It is violated in ways we can all agree to deplore—e.g., nepotism—but it is also violated in ways we tolerate, or even celebrate. Élite colleges, for example, routinely seek geographical diversity in their student bodies, turning down better-qualified applicants from Brooklyn or Brookline to make room for a North Dakotan. Yet people are not tearing their hair out over that. Preferential treatment for alumni children is also fairly uncontroversial.

These are narrowly mechanical examples. More generally, consider child rearing. You cannot watch what frenzied yuppie parents do for their kids—the intelligence-nurturing toys, the infinite variety of special lessons, and so on—without concluding that either these parents are wasting a lot of money and energy or their kids are gaining a major leg up in life. I suppose the correct answer is both. Yet who would criticize these parents for wanting the best for their kids? Then, there are connections. A friend recently asked me to help her son get a summer job in journalism. And, of course, I did what I could. Should I have refused to help my friend's kid, in the name of "equal opportunity"? It wouldn't be human.

The child of a Supreme Court justice, to choose a ripe example, will enjoy vast quantities of this kind of unequal opportunity—whatever the child's race, and whatever the parent's stated views on affirmative action. Racism need not be involved. But this sort of thing does, as a practical matter, put most blacks at a real disadvantage. And it puts the whole notion of "equal opportunity" in a strange light.

It is important to distinguish two different arguments for "equal opportunity." There is the economic-efficiency argument: that the economy works best, for the good of the entire society, when an irrelevant factor like race (or connections or geography) is not allowed to interfere with selecting the best-qualified person for the job. Then there is the fairness argument: that it is unfair to a particular individual to deny him or her a job or other career opportunity because of an irrelevant factor like race (or connections or geography). The efficiency argument is valid, at least in theory. The fairness argument is much murkier. Yet it is the fairness argument that sustains opposition to affirmative action.

In "The Bell Curve," the best-selling book on race, genes, and intelligence, Charles Murray and the late Richard Herrnstein willfully, or sloppily, confuse the two arguments. The authors make clear their hostility to affirmative action. Indeed, it doesn't require too much psychological overreaching to speculate that hostility to affirmative action was a chief motivation for their project. They ask, in reference to affirmative action, "To what extent is a society fair when people of similar ability and background are treated as differently as they are now?" And they answer, "Such a society is manifestly unfair." Although they acknowledge that blacks are still behind whites in job status and pay, they argue that this is not true "after controlling for I.Q." In other words, blacks are already doing as well as they deserve to, given their lower intelligence. Therefore, Murray and Herrnstein conclude, affirmative action imposes "costs in economic efficiency and fairness."

One reviewer of "The Bell Curve"—Alan Ryan, writing in *The New York Review of Books*—labels this the "dollars per IQ point" argument, and dryly observes, "If your notion of justice is that people should be paid according to their IQs, then [affirmative action] is unjust." But, furthermore, Murray and Herrnstein have the logical connection between their factual assertions about I.Q. and their moral outrage about affirmative action exactly backward. The more ability is determined to be innate and inexorable—something you're born with and bear no moral responsibility for—the less sense it makes to talk about equal opportunity in moral terms as a matter of "fairness." What kind of "equal opportunity" is it to be born with a low I.Q.?

Whatever combination of genes and environment may be responsible, each of us plays the game of life with cards dealt by forces largely beyond our control. The content of our characters is the least of it. This makes "equal opportunity" a dubi-

EUGÉNE MIHAESCO

"You folks ready to order?"

ous, if not meaningless, standard of fairness. Dispensing with the fairness argument and sticking with economic efficiency would leave affirmative-action opponents on a firmer logical footing (though published estimates of the cost of affirmative action—four per cent of gross national product, in one case—are highly tendentious). But abandoning the banner of "fairness" would drain the cause of most of its demagogic appeal. And, to the reasonable mind, it would raise the question of whether the social benefit was worth a certain economic cost.

After all, traditional civil-rights enforcement of the kind almost everyone claims to believe in can also impose a real economic cost. Much discrimination in the economy is motivated not by irrational racism but by rational economic calculation. It is easier and cheaper to hire on the basis of group generalizations than to judge each person on individual merit. If those generalizations made no economic sense, a law would not be necessary to prevent most employers from making them. But we do have such a law, having correctly decided that social justice is worth some economic cost. In this way, among others, affirmative action is on a continuum with traditional civil-rights principles, not a departure from them.

Of course, it is widely believed that the proper goal of civil rights is a society where people are judged as individuals and not as members of a group. This ideal, many people say, is what divides "good" civil rights from "bad" affirmative action. But, like "equal opportunity" and other shibboleths of the affirmative-action debate, the appealing notion of "individuals, not groups" is more a slogan than a coherent principle.

What does it mean to judge people "as individuals" and not as members of a group? Does it mean that each person should be evaluated in a way that does not involve assumptions based on that person's membership in some group? In that sense, no one is ever judged as an individual. Every criterion used in the meritocratic selection process, whether for a job or a place at school, is a generalization from some group trait. Those generalizations are always approximate, and sometimes wrong. Even the most seemingly scientific and individually tailored measurement—say, a score on a medical-school entrance exam—cannot predict with perfect accuracy who will make the best doctors. People who score high on the exam are being judged, as a group, more likely than others to become good doctors, and as a generalization that may be perfectly valid. (More refined selection machinery may be impossible or too costly.) But it *is* a group generalization.

True, there are groups and groups. "People who score high on their medical-school entrance exams" are not self-identified as a group, and feel no group affinity. Other groups that get systematic group preference in our society—veterans, for example—have more of the symptoms of "groupiness." Giving veterans preference (e.g., for civil-service jobs) violates the "equal opportunity" principle that a job should go to the best-qualified candidate. It does so in favor of the apparently superior principle of rewarding those who have sacrificed for their country. But that, too, is only a generalization. Some veterans may have sacrificed nothing in particular, while non-veterans who have sacrificed greatly in other ways get no preference, or may even lose out to a less deserving veteran. The point is not that giving veterans preference is a bad idea—only that, like any group generalization, it is approximate. Yet we live with it.

What is different about group generalizations based on race? Generalizations that discriminate against blacks have been outlawed for obvious historical reasons. But what of group generalizations that discriminate in favor of blacks? How are they different from the group generalizations that are the warp and woof of daily life? The answer cannot be that they are different simply because race is innate and immutable. So, according to its enthusiasts, is I.Q.—yet opponents of affirmative action generally wish to see the role of such innate characteristics (if not I.Q., then "merit" or "talent") enhanced, not reduced. The answer must be that race is such a toxic subject in American culture that it should not enter into calculations about people's places in society—even in order to benefit racism's historic victims. That is a respectable answer. But it understandably rings hollow to many blacks, who see this sudden and ostentatious anathema on racial consciousness as a bit too convenient. Where was color blindness when they needed it?

In practice, moreover, even the most devout preachers of C.B.E.O. tolerate violations of the alleged color-blind principle, either because of a more important principle or because of some consideration more pressing than principle. The Republican Party, for example, has never acted as if it regarded color blindness as a supreme moral axiom. Republicans, who were slow to approach the C.B.E.O. zero point in the nineteen-sixties, have often charged past it in the years since. If color blindness is a virtue, hypocrisy is in this case the tribute virtue pays to vice.

Like many of the supposed excesses of the Great Society, affirmative action actually got its big push under President Richard Nixon. The first official government affirmative-action program was the Philadelphia Plan, designed to cure racial segregation in the construction industry by making federal contracts contingent on the racial composition of the workforce. The plan was created and then killed by the Johnson Administration; Nixon not only revived it but lobbied hard to prevent Congress from killing it again.

During the Reagan years, Administration officials like Clarence Thomas, the chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, enforced racial hiring "goals." The 1988 Republican platform promised to "increase, strengthen, and reinvigorate" government programs that earmarked contracts and subsidized loans for minorities. Although the 1992 platform declared, "Promoting opportunity, we reject efforts to replace equal rights with quotas or other preferential treatment," David Frum points out in his book, "Dead Right," "Every committee convened at the [1992] convention was required to be half composed of women and the speaking roster was filled with the names of nobodies selected only because of their sex or race." Even as the G.O.P. plots to make racial favoritism its hot-button issue for 1996, *Newsweek* reports on a "GOP Minority Outreach Strategy" memo that calls for preferential committee assignments for minority House members and special efforts to find minorities to testify at congressional hearings.

But this kind of garden-variety political hypocrisy is less interesting than the larger, and possibly sincere, moral confusion of those who maintain that there's a good kind of affirmative action, which upholds the C.B.E.O. principle, and a bad kind, which betrays it. This is a widespread view, even among the harshest critics of affirmative action as it is practiced today. Something like it may be what House Speaker Newt Gingrich had in mind when he remarked the other day, semi-coherently, "It is my belief that affirmative-action programs, if done for individuals, are good, but if done by some group distinction, bad, because it is antithetical to the American dream to measure people by the genetic patterns of their great-grandmothers." In "The Bell Curve" Murray and Herrnstein are a bit clearer. The context is a discussion of college-admissions policy, but the logic applies to affirmative action in any field:

> Universities should cast a wide net in seeking applicants, making special efforts to seek talent wherever it lives—in the black South Bronx, Latino Los Angeles, and white Appalachia alike. In the case of two candidates who are fairly closely matched otherwise, universities should give the nod to the applicant from the disadvantaged background. This original sense of affirmative action seems to us to have been not only reasonable and fair but wise.

Like others who take a similar line, Murray and Herrnstein claim to be asserting a prelapsarian civil-rights ideal. This "good" kind of affirmative action has three elements. First, it involves only the preliminary stages of the selection process (often summarized as "recruitment and training"), not the offer of a job or other selective goody itself. Second, it is only a tiebreaker: no one of superior merit will ever be displaced by someone of inferior merit. Third, "disadvantage" is defined in nonracial terms. (This is sometimes called affirmative action by social or economic class.) Do these elements describe an effective form of affirmative action that nevertheless passes C.B.E.O. muster? Not really.

First, discrimination in recruitment and training is still discrimination. Someone in the disfavored class will not get the job who otherwise would. If the special recruitment efforts are aimed specifically at racial minorities, as affirmative-action opponents less zealous than Murray and Herrnstein would allow, that means that whites who might also benefit from recruitment and training are being victimized.

Second, a tiebreaker matters only for the last available slot. If two people are equally qualified for admission to a col-

"We got him onto an exercise bike, but I'm afraid it was too late."

lege class of a thousand, the solution is to admit or to reject them both, unless—by an extraordinary coincidence—they are worse qualified than exactly nine hundred and ninety-nine other applicants. It is affirmative-action critics—especially Murray and Herrnstein, with their I.Q. obsession—who seem to imagine that everyone in America can be ranked with scientific precision, from No. 1 to No. 260,000,000, in terms of his or her qualification for any desirable career opportunity. Under that assumption, or even under a less extreme version of it, tiebreaker affirmative action would be meaningless. But if you start to take a more relaxed and nuanced view of "qualifications"—that people are often equally qualified, or, at least, that the machinery for ranking people by qualifications is often crude—you undermine both the fairness case and the efficiency case against traditional affirmative action.

Third, what about affirmative action based on "disadvantage" rather than on race? In recent weeks, this has become the hottest idea in the affirmative-action debate. Even President Clinton, answering a press-conference question about affirmative action on March 3rd, said that he favors "need-based programs."

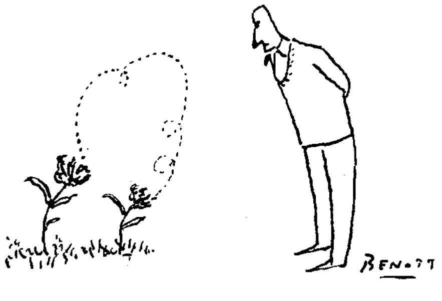
Reverse discrimination based on something other than race would indeed make affirmative action color-blind but would not cure affirmative action's other supposed defects. It would still be social engineering. There would still be "victims." It would still mean passing over a better-"qualified" candidate for a less "qualified" one. If that is unfair and economically costly, the injustice and the cost remain even though the color consciousness would be eliminated. The alleged stigma—to oneself and others—of having got the desirable slot through affirmative action rather than by one's own just deserts would remain as well.

Then, there is the problem of defining and comparing "disadvantage." Affirmative-action opponents have justifiable fun with the puzzle of deciding, in a society of racial mongrels, who, exactly, is black—and, beyond that, what other ethnic groups should qualify for official "victim" status. Changing the standard to disadvantage in the abstract would make the puzzle a nightmare. Is it worse to be a cleaning lady's son or a coal miner's daughter? Two points if your father didn't go to college, minus one if he finished high school, plus three if you have no father? (Or will that reward illegitimacy, which we're all trying hard these days not to do?) Communist societies tried this kind of institutionalized reverse discrimination—penalizing children of the middle class—without any enviable success. Officially sanctioned affirmative action by "disadvantage" would turn today's festival of competitive victimization into an orgy.

Once you accept "disadvantage" as a legitimate ground for favoritism, moreover, the question arises of whether it is so terrible to use "black" as at least one rough-and-ready shorthand for "disadvantaged." After all, advocates of this kind of affirmative action acknowledge that many, if not most, of its beneficiaries would, in fact, be black. To be sure, not all blacks are disadvantaged, and not all disadvantaged people (however you choose to define the word) are black. But generalizations, as has been noted, are an inevitable part of any selection process. And the generalization "Black equals disadvantaged" is probably as accurate as many generalizations that go unchallenged, such as "High test score equals good doctor" or "Veteran equals sacrifice for the nation."

So opponents of today's affirmative action cannot take refuge in some ideal version of it that would avoid giving offense to their stated principles. And even today there are many situations where affirmative-action opponents don't uphold the alleged principle of color blindness—or where they preach it while practicing the opposite. How much is left of the C.B.E.O. principle when all these situations are added up?

Almost everybody accepts, for example, the idea that sometimes diversity of races, or even race itself, is a valid job consideration. Hiring policemen is a common illustration. Being black is a positive job qualification for a cop patrolling a black neighborhood (or, at least, racial diversity is a valid hiring goal for a city police force). The selection of Supreme Court justices is widely accepted to be another situation where it seems to be O.K. to take race or sex into account. Why? Because the notion that measuring "qualifications" alone can scientifically pinpoint the best Supreme Court justice is especially absurd, and because the notion that a diverse Supreme Court has value for its own sake is especially appealing. Ronald Reagan promised outright to appoint a woman justice, and did so. George Bush swore that race had nothing to do with his selection of Clarence Thomas, but nobody believed him.



A more complicated example of acceptable reverse discrimination is the whole area of "remedies." Although there are arguments about the details, even hard-core affirmative-action opponents accept the principle that racially conscious "remedies"—e.g., reverse discrimination, even quotas—may be imposed by the courts (or sometimes by lesser authorities) when an employer or an organization is found to have practiced traditional racial discrimination in the past. This is supposedly part of the "true," pre-1969 meaning of "civil rights." It's an odd exception to the alleged color-blind principle, when you think about it. Can the same civil-rights precepts really forbid you to practice reverse discrimination except when they require you to do the same thing? (That is indeed how the 1964 Civil Rights Act is generally interpreted.) The idea of a judicial "remedy" is that the victim of injustice has a right to be made whole and the wrongdoer has no right to complain. But the reverse-discrimination remedy usually benefits people who were not victims of the specific act of past discrimination, and the burden falls on people who were not responsible for it or beneficiaries of it.

In a way, the "remedy" exception, if you accept its logic, swallows the ostensible color-blindness rule. After all, a major justification for affirmative action in general is making up for past discrimination. The whole thing is a remedy. Indeed, the "remedy" logic works better in general than it does in the particular. Unlike past specific episodes of racial injustice, past racial injustice in general really does have some bearing on the relative places of random blacks and whites today. If people really could be ranked from No. 1 to No. 260,000,000 in terms of "qualifications," past discrimination

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marked for minorities violated C.B.E.O. and were against the law. A fuss ensued, and the Administration retreated to the position that the anathema on minority scholarships applied only to scholarships financed by universities themselves. Minority scholarships financed by private individuals, corporations, and foundations were not merely permissible but praiseworthy. "I've long been committed to them," George Bush said. The alleged difference was that universities are federal contractors, and therefore semi-governmental actors. But it was never explained how racially earmarked scholarships could be immoral in the one case and praiseworthy in the other.

Is private affirmative action good or bad? Even the right-wing Heritage Foundation has had scholarships earmarked for minorities. Private efforts directed specifically at minorities, amounting to overt racial favoritism, are widespread, and it is unthinkable that conservatives, of all people, would want the power of the federal government used to smash them. What's more, it is a perfectly coherent position to hold that private individuals should have more leeway to discriminate than the government has. But that doesn't solve the mystery of why the identical violation of the sacred C.B.E.O. principle should be positively evil when practiced by the government and positively good when practiced privately. After all, private, voluntary affirmative action is not "voluntary" for the victim—the white person who can't get a job or scholarship because a minor-

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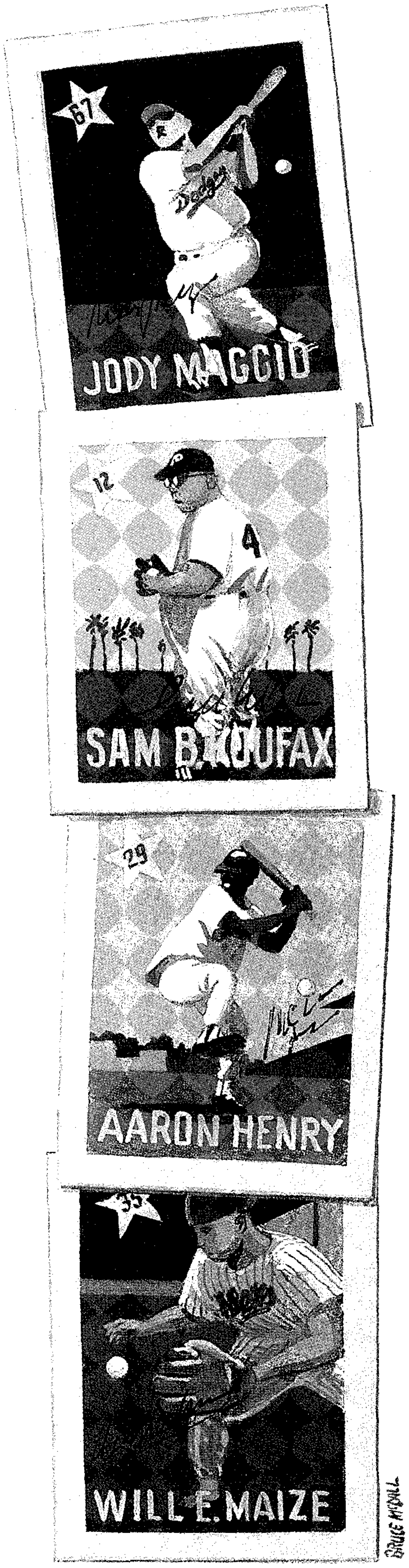
opponents.

There are only two ways to escape from this logical box while preserving a commitment to C.B.E.O. One would be to support a government crackdown on private efforts to help minorities—which is hardly what those plotting to make affirmative action a big political issue have in mind. (Some might favor a crackdown on brazen reverse discrimination—such as overt racial quotas—even when it is private. But few would use the civil-rights laws against reverse discrimination as rigorously as we use them against discrimination of the classic sort.) The other option would be to support repeal of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, thereby allowing private, voluntary racial discrimination of all kinds. Whatever its other merits, this second option would certainly bury the notion that affirmative-action opponents wish to fulfill the true meaning of the Civil Rights Act. A third option, of course, would be to abandon the pretense that C.B.E.O. is a coherent principle.

The point is that a pure, discrimination-free society is not merely a hopeless ideal; it is a logical mirage. One final example: actuarial justice. Whites live longer than blacks; women live longer than men. Actuarially, whites should have to pay more each year for the equivalent Social Security pension, and pay less for the equivalent life-insurance policy. Ditto women and men. Does race-neutral—and sex-neutral—justice require that whites and blacks, women and men, pay the same rates, or that they get the same insurance value per dollar paid? There is

REPLACEMENT HALL OF FAME



no logical solution to this puzzle. (That's why our real-life solutions are all over the lot.)

To be sure, affirmative-action supporters have their own muddles and false distinctions, and pay their own hypocritical obeisance to C.B.E.O. They cling to a mythical difference between affirmative action and reverse discrimination, or between goals and quotas. In the 1978 Bakke case, the Supreme Court's first major ruling on affirmative action, Justice Lewis Powell made much of the distinction between using race as a "factor" in the selection process and using it as the "decisive" factor. But, for any given applicant, the selection process is an all-or-nothing proposition. And a factor is not a factor unless it sometimes makes the difference. When race is the deciding factor, it might just as well have been the sole factor: someone has gained an opportunity, and someone else has lost one, simply because of race. Likewise, there is no sensible moral distinction between a flexible goal and a rigid quota. Both are reverse discrimination. If the goal never leads to a specific advantage for a specific individual, it is meaningless. And if that advantage causes some other individual to lose out, it might as well have been a quota of one as far as he is concerned.

Good people find this hard to accept. They cling to Justice Powell's comforting belief in the ambiguity of "factors." But consider a law-school class of a hundred. Case 1: Ten places in the class are reserved for blacks. It is the "decisive" factor. This is roughly the situation that Powell found unconstitutional in Bakke. Case 2: In the admissions formula, whatever it may be—board scores plus grades minus parking tickets, and so on—blacks are awarded extra points. It's just a "factor"—O.K. by the Powell standard—but some number of extra points will produce exactly ten blacks in the class. Indeed, under the assumption that everyone, black or white, can be ranked by formula, they will be the same ten blacks who would be admitted under a rigid quota. And the same whites—some number up to ten of them—will lose their places. What, morally, is the difference?

The federal courts are currently revisiting another false distinction enshrined in their own doctrine: that between reverse discrimination in hiring and reverse discrimination in layoffs. In 1986, the courts ruled against reverse discrimination in layoffs, reasoning, "While hiring goals impose a diffuse burden . . . layoffs impose the entire burden of achieving racial equality on particular individuals." Of course, hiring goals also impose the entire burden on a particular individual—the one who would have got the job but didn't. The burden is "diffuse" only in the sense that in hirings, as opposed to layoffs, we don't know who that person is. This may make affirmative action more politically tolerable, in the way that we often impose burdens in the abstract (such as, ultimately, the burden of dying in defense of one's country) that would be unbearable to impose in the particular. But is there a real moral distinction between hirings and layoffs? I can't see it. Affirmative-action defenders, like affirmative-action opponents, must have the courage of their convictions—for opponents, that C.B.E.O. is an absolute principle; for defenders, that reverse racial discrimination is morally justified—or must revise them.

The current layoffs case that is drawing a lot of attention, Taxman v. Piscataway, involves two public-school teachers, one black and one white, who were equal by every available standard of C.B.E.O., such as academic credentials and written evaluations. They were equal, as well, by seniority—a typical sort of non-C.B.E.O. standard that doesn't seem to bother anybody. If it weren't for affirmative action, the choice between them would have been made by the flip of a coin. So this is what the affirmative-action debate comes down to. Is the color-blind principle so sacred, so inviolable, that the school board must flip a coin rather than decide that America might be better off with more black teachers?

Of course, what I have been arguing here has not really been the case for affirmative action—more like the case against the case against affirmative action. And I have not meant to suggest that a color-blind society—or, at least, a color-blind economy—is a meaningless or worthless goal. The point is that it's a complicated and ambiguous goal, and the notion that all other goals—including other civil-rights goals—must give way before it belongs in the world of agitprop.

C.B.E.O. is not the only argument made against affirmative action. There is the stigma argument: the assumption of inferiority—by the affirmative-action beneficiaries themselves as well as by others. The stigma, as critics point out, attaches even to minority-group members who are making it, or could make it, without affirmative action. There is the undeniable social tension and resentment caused by the perception that affirmative action is unfair, whether that perception is rational or not. (This argument, of course, is often advanced by the very people working to aggravate the social tension they claim to deplore.) There is the problem of limiting the principle. What groups—women? Hispanics? Asians?—are entitled to affirmative action, and how do you define the members of the group?

And, as with any form of social engineering, there is the problem of politicizing outcomes that—just or unjust—would otherwise be written off as the workings of fate. The last thing our political culture needs is more opportunities for people to take umbrage. By making the question of who gets what job a matter of public policy, affirmative action opens it up to politics. In politics, almost by definition, minority interests are at a disadvantage. So, to some extent, affirmative action brings its current problems on itself.

All these problems suggest that affirmative action is a social policy that should be used with care, weighing the costs against the benefits in each circumstance. What they do not suggest is that a ban on affirmative action is anything like a moral imperative.

One form of affirmative action that certainly does not meet a reasonable cost-benefit test is affirmative action for businesses owned by minorities and women: preferential access to government contracts, subsidized loans, and communication licenses. The House of Representatives recently voted to kill one of these preferences—a fat tax break for companies that sell broadcast and cable stations to minorities—and rightly so. Anyone in a position to buy and operate a television station either is already affluent or is just fronting for white males. Rich blacks undoubtedly face disadvantages compared with rich whites, but they are not disadvantages worth incurring the real costs of affirmative action to rectify. The Federal Communications Commission's affirmative-action policy has been especially farcical. Members of favored groups who get valuable licenses, for nothing or at a discount, are more or less free to resell them, at market rates, to white males or anyone else. The policy amounts to the simple anointment of black millionaires. And, because black-millionaire businessmen are such an obvious exception to the generalization that "black equals disadvantaged," these policies help to discredit affirmative action even in situations where the generalization makes more sense.

"No. 319. A long silk-organza halter dress with arabesque crystal beading. With it Clarisse carries an unobtrusive .38 revolver with a handle of cloisonné enamel."

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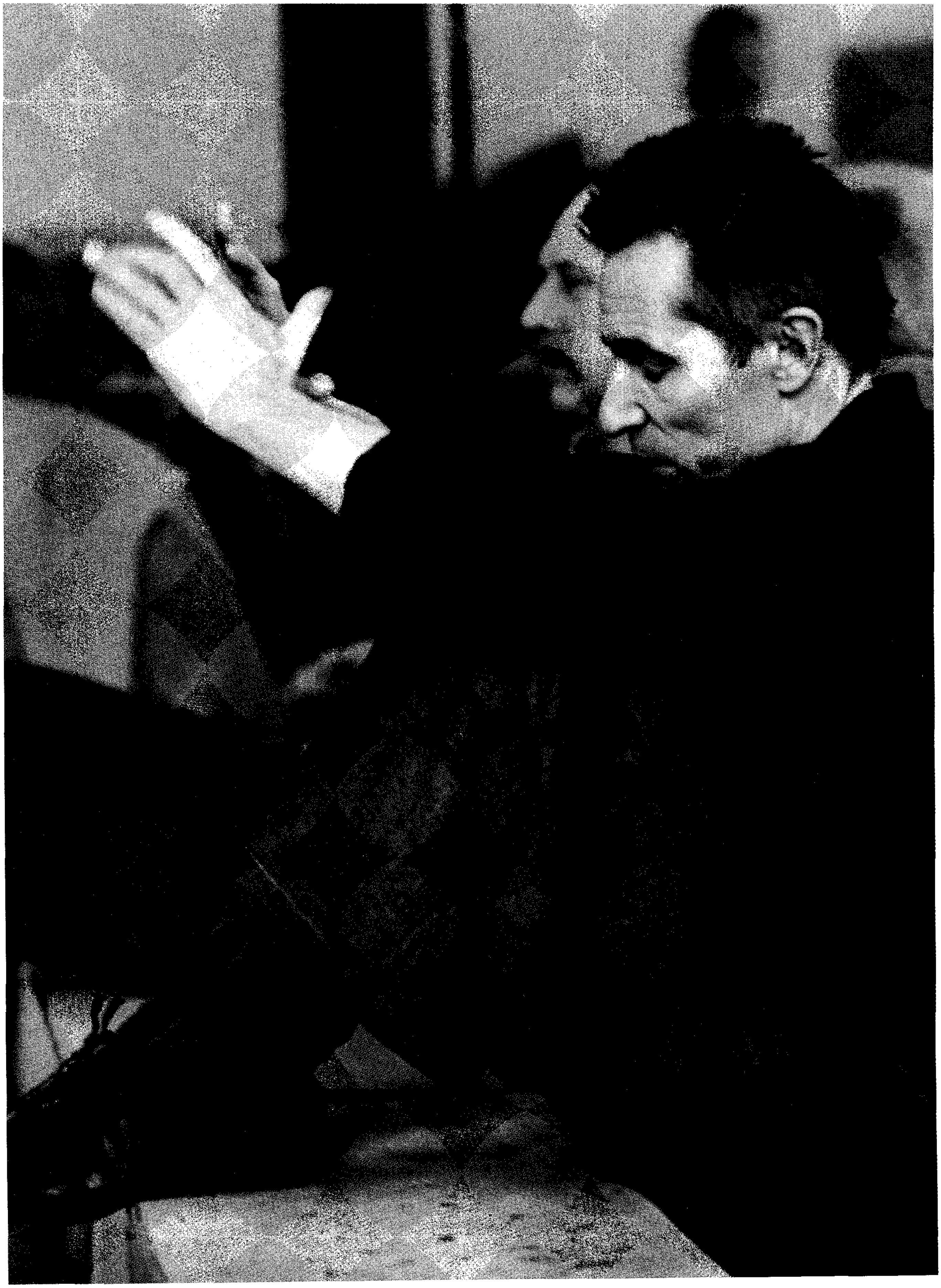
But the F.C.C. insanity illuminates an important fact about the reverse-discrimination controversy: reverse discrimination usually occurs in situations where someone—often the government—is allocating inequality. Somebody gets a valuable government license; somebody else doesn't. Somebody gets into medical school; somebody else doesn't. And, rather than obsessing about whether the inequality ought to be allocated on the basis of race, we might do better to ponder whether reducing the inequality might make more sense than arguing about the allocation.

The F.C.C. has been anointing millionaires for decades. Most of them have been white males. Only recently has it begun auctioning off (rather than giving away) some of its valuable licenses, so that their value is shared by all of us. That change is surely a greater triumph for fairness than either applying or repealing affirmative action. An economist would look at the excess demand for medical-school slots and say that this is a market out of whack. The selection process—even assuming that applicants can be ranked accurately according to their doctoring potential—excludes many who would become good doctors. Instead of arguing about the race of those who make the cut, why not try to bring the market into equilibrium? A variety of government policies—such as over-restrictive rules about what services nurses and paramedics may perform—artificially inflate the advantage of being a doctor. Reform those policies (which is starting to happen), and the market will begin to sort itself out. More of those who wish to become doctors will be able to do so. Surely that serves egalitarian principles more than a change—in either direction—in the racial composition of medical-school admissions.

Affirmative action has become a scapegoat for the anxieties of the white middle class. Some of those anxieties are justified; some are self-indulgent fantasies. But the actual role of affirmative action in denying opportunities to white people is small compared with its role in the public imagination and the public debate. Black unemployment is still higher than white unemployment, and blacks still trail whites in every major prestige occupation outside sports. That reality raises many troubling questions—about affirmative action, among other things. But it also suggests that few whites have actually lost a career opportunity to a less qualified black—certainly far fewer than the number who have been whipped into a fury of resentment over affirmative action.

What is most poisonous about the campaign against affirmative action is that it invites whites to blame blacks for their problems. What is almost as poisonous, though, is the way attacks on affirmative action reinforce the one-to-two-hundred-and-sixty-million myth: the myth that, in the absence of racial discrimination, we would all find our places in life according to our just deserts. Oddly, the philosophy of affirmative action itself derives from, and reinforces, the same myth. This myth nurtures frenzies of resentment that do our politics plenty of damage. American society would be healthier—and not only on the race issue—if people, black and white, would keep in mind that neither just deserts nor nefarious discrimination is as important, in determining one's lot in life, as simple luck. ♦



Grigorovich survived the years of Soviet artistic isolation, but did he sell out to the state?

NIGHTS AT THE BALLET

THE CZAR'S LAST DANCE

Yuri Grigorovich, the director of the Bolshoi—the company that won the West—finally fell from grace after thirty years, during which ballet played the understudy to intrigue and politics. But did he preserve Russian dance, or destroy it?

BY LUKE JENNINGS

On the evening of Thursday, March 9th, Russia's state TV station, RTR, announced that Yuri Grigorovich, after serving for more than thirty years as the artistic director and chief choreographer of Moscow's Bolshoi Ballet, had resigned. "I feel it is impossible for me to continue working at the Bolshoi Theatre," he said to the Itar-Tass news agency. Grigorovich has long been one of the most controversial figures in the world of performing arts; he is acknowledged as one of the twentieth century's most significant balletmakers and the architect of the Bolshoi's international reputation, but his enemies cite his career as a classic example of paranoia, tyranny, and creative sclerosis, and have described him as the company's gravedigger. His departure came after months of bitter political and theatrical infighting; and over the years there had been so much disinformation, so many announcements that the czar of the Bolshoi was finally to be deposed, that at first no one could quite believe that he had gone. The RTR announcement was accurate, however—delivered by a spokesman for the office of President Boris Yeltsin.

The next morning, the Bolshoi's dancers (most of whom weren't born when Grigorovich was awarded control of the company, in 1964) made their way to the theatre as usual. They found chaos. A performance of Grigorovich's "Romeo and Juliet" was scheduled, but instead, that evening, the curtain rose on a group of dancers in jeans and T-shirts, and it was announced that the performance was being cancelled to protest Grigorovich's departure. More than a dozen company members were suspended, including Grigorovich's wife, the former prima ballerina Natalia Bessmertnova, and his casting director, Yuri Vetrov. For the first time in the theatre's history, the Bolshoi box office found itself forced to give refunds to furious ticket holders. "It was a nightmare," one company administrator said. "But it was nothing compared to what is to come."

The final act of Grigorovich's career with the Bolshoi began as it ended, with a broadcast. Last summer, Muscovites were informed by the Echo of Moscow radio station that a radical change was to be effected at the Bolshoi Theatre: the artistic directorship was to be removed from Grigorovich and awarded to one of his greatest rivals, the glamorous ex-ballerina Maya Plisetskaya. In Plisetskaya's capable hands, the announcer proclaimed, the Bolshoi was finally to be brought to "normalcy." Within minutes of the end of this announcement, which was extraordinary even by Moscow standards, the news was relayed by telephone to Tokyo, where Grigorovich's choreographic group (a separate entity from the main Bolshoi Ballet) was performing. A company member in Grigorovich's hotel suite took the call, and a version of the story was shouted through to the bathroom, where the sixty-seven-year-old choreographer was taking a shower. Stunned by the broadcast's challenge—in describing the event to me later, he pounded his heart—Grigorovich slipped and fell, badly bruising his hip and breaking two ribs. When he finally reached the telephone, the voice at the other end told him, "You no longer exist."

Bolshoi-watching has long been a Muscovite obsession. During the Soviet era, there was no uncensored ballet criticism, and for those without influential connections or access to hard currency tickets to performances in the Bolshoi Theatre were all but impossible to come by. Rumor and speculation concerning the Bolshoi's vivid cast of characters, however, were freely available. The tighter the clamp on the flow of unofficial information from the company, the more riveting—and the more valuable as social currency—became the tales of intrigue and vendetta within. And inevitably the stories got out. The theatre's army of employees gossiped. Certain dancers had (and retain) claques of strident and uncritical applauders, and these were rewarded with insider confidences. The cognoscenti learned to read between the lines of bland-seeming interviews for obliquely laid information; and, occasionally, when some blunt representative of the foreign press asked a direct question, an answer of a kind was discernible in the evasive reply.

Maya Plisetskaya—beautiful, volatile, and outspoken (a friend of the Kennedys, Marc Chagall, and Warren Beatty, among others)—had been a cult figure for half a century, and remained, in the minds of many, the embodiment of Russian nonconformist chic. (In 1973, along with other well-known personalities and intellectuals, Plisetskaya took the risk of signing a letter protesting the rehabilitation of Stalin.) Even before the August broadcast, and despite the fact that she was no longer living in Russia, she had been in the news. Her memoirs, in which she excoriated Grigorovich as a tyrant, had been published earlier in the year, amid enormous now-it-can-be-told brouhaha, and the timing of the whole thing seemed, at the very least, fortuitous.

And Plisetskaya was not the only threat to Grigorovich's position. Vladimir Vasiliev, a former star dancer, who for two decades had maintained an intransigent personal and artistic opposition to the director, was also waiting in the wings. Vasiliev, as much as any ballerina, could be described as having been Grigorovich's muse during the choreographer's early and most productive years.

They shared the same dark fatalism, their careers are artistically inseparable, and in a certain measure their twenty-year conflict has represented an extension of this symbiosis. Even today it is hard to see Vasiliev, with his Soviet Realist handsomeness, and not see a Grigorovich stage hero. Long prevented by Grigorovich from participating in the artistic life of the Bolshoi, Vasiliev and his wife, the ballerina Ekaterina Maximova, became involved with the ballet company based at the Kremlin Palace, less than ten minutes' walk from the Bolshoi Theatre. Like Plisetskaya, Vasiliev and Maximova had an extensive cult following, and if they attracted less obvious publicity than Plisetskaya they were more persistently present: their apartment, opposite Moscow's White House, served as a miniature court-in-exile for the artistically disaffected.

Grigorovich and Vladimir Vasiliev, the star he later sidelined, take a curtain call for "Sleeping Beauty" in Moscow.

For Grigorovich, who was on his way home from a failed overseas tour, the Plisetskaya announcement came at the worst possible time. The worldwide legend of the Bolshoi was unravelling as the political circumstances it depended upon changed: the company was stupefied by intrigue and defections, and Grigorovich himself had not produced an original full-length ballet since 1982. For the last two decades, he had battled to keep at bay the forces seeking to depose him, but now it seemed that, finally, he was losing.

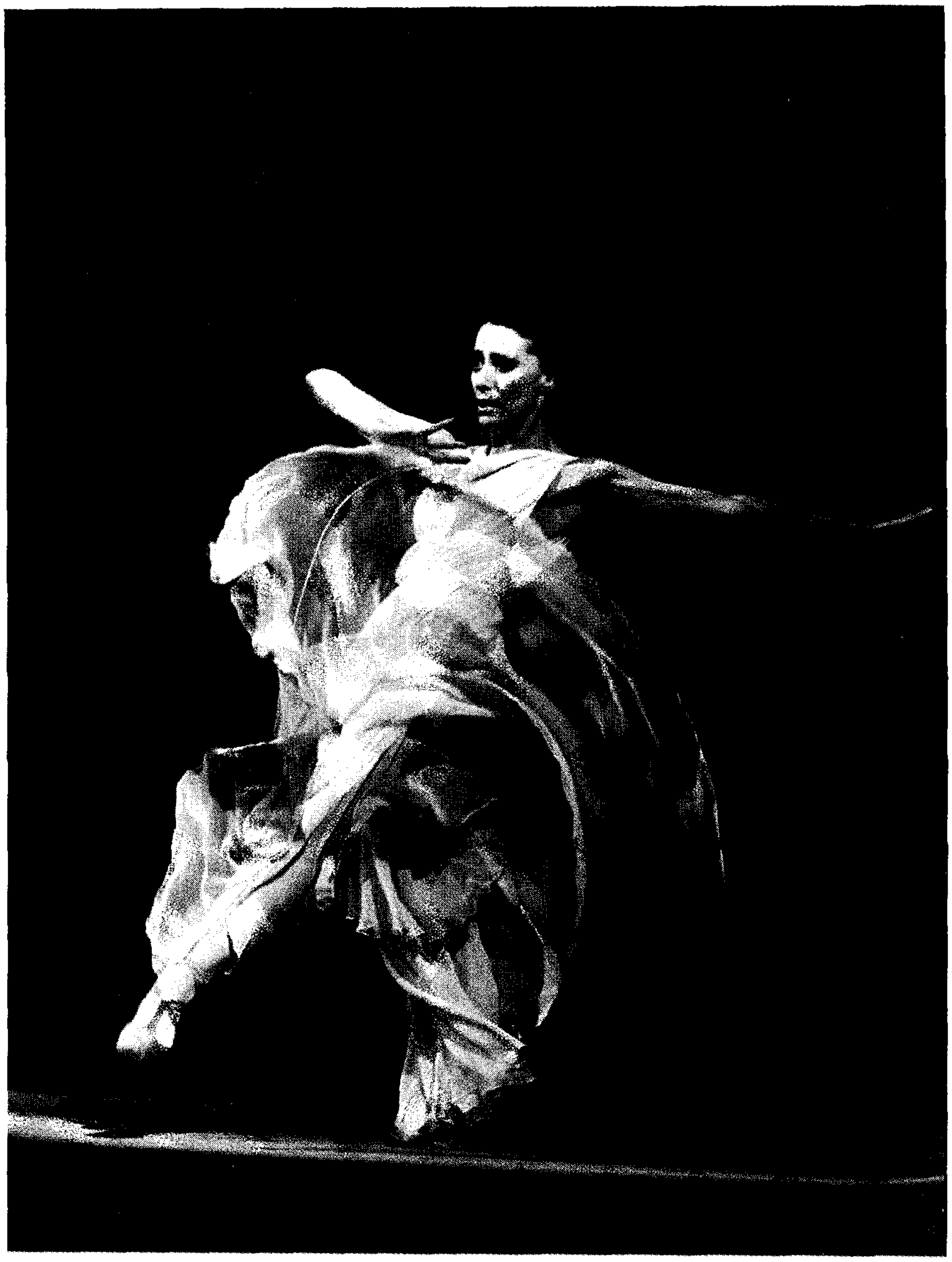
The Plisetskaya story was picked up by the *Times* and other Western media. After two days of nugatory blustering from the Bolshoi management and the Russian Ministry of Culture, Plisetskaya issued a cool denial of involvement from her dacha in Lithuania. The broadcast had been pure disinformation, but the end of the Grigorovich era, Muscovites guessed, would not be long in coming. His successors were already jockeying for position.

THE Bolshoi Ballet became a wonder of the world in 1956, when it appeared in London for the first time, and this legendary identity was reinforced three years later with the company's first visit to New York. It was partly a question of scale: the vast Bolshoi (literally, "Big") stage accommodated the largest company in the world, and even its half-strength touring parties outnumbered the full complement of most Western companies. Its productions displayed a grandness that British and American audiences had never before encountered but that corresponded precisely to their postwar yearnings for ordered and fundamentally conservative fantasy. Since the days of Diaghilev, the preëminence of Russian ballet schooling had been assumed by the Western public, and the virtuoso Bolshoi dancers, rank after rank of them, confirmed it.

While Leningrad's Kirov Ballet was older and classically purer, the Bolshoi—strident, heroic, and off-classical; masculine to the Kirov's feminine—became Sovietism's favored instrument. In 1944, the Kirov provided the Bolshoi with its most important choreographer of the day, Leonid Lavrovsky, and, in 1956, with Soviet ballet's prima ballerina, Galina Ulanova. (Lavrovsky's "Romeo and Juliet," with Ulanova as Juliet, was the ballet with which the West was won.) And in 1964, five years after the Bolshoi's first New York triumph, the Kirov ceded a second great choreographer to Moscow—Yuri Grigorovich.

If heritage and artistry created the Bolshoi legend, the Cold War augmented it. The company's size, its shepherding by the K.G.B., the rumors of Grigorovich's despotism—all these fed into prevailing "evil empire" fears, lending the Bolshoi a dark glamour with which free-world companies could not hope to compete. The Bolshoi, to Western eyes, became more than a ballet company—it became the beautiful face of the enemy. "There are three Russian words that everyone knows," the company's general manager ruefully informed me. "Vodka, Kalashnikov, and Bolshoi."

The story of Grigorovich is that of a man who danced with the devil, who thought he could play the Soviet state at its own game and win. The Bolshoi Ballet was created as an imperial amusement, but it survived the October Revolution to become the U.S.S.R.'s greatest instrument of cultural propaganda. Born into the Soviet system (although never a member of the Communist Party), Grigorovich understood what was expected of him: that his productions should express the grand themes and ideals of Communism. He understood that if he was to be allowed to create at all, the censors had to be kept happy. As a subtle and ambitious young man, however, he may have thought that these requirements could be subverted, that by dint of skillful maneuvering he could enjoy both artistic integrity and privilege. His attempt to walk this tightrope is evident in all his work: the ballets are robustly Soviet on the surface, but their subtexts offer a different—even an opposite—interpretation. In the end, of course, such a balancing act cannot be sustained, and Grigorovich's desire to stay in place and in power led him to make artistic compromises. The maintenance of his power—and the need to keep his rivals in check—became an end unto itself, and the Mephistophelian bargain he had struck proved no bargain at all. By the time the Soviet state imploded, Grigorovich was fatally implicated.



Maya Plisetskaya, Grigorovich's great rival and rumored replacement, in 1978. His attitude was, she says, "L'état, c'est moi."

ITAR-TASS/SOVFOTO

In September, 1992, I had dinner with him on the outskirts of Moscow. We were at one of the city's best restaurants, and on the walls around our table hung signed photographs of cosmonauts and statesmen. Most of the other diners were wearing suits; Grigorovich, toward whom their glances intermittently flickered, was wearing jeans and a leather jacket. With his steel-gray crewcut and spare, weathered features, the choreographer cut an unextravagant figure amid the restaurant's plush, yet his presence blazed—his authority was absolute.

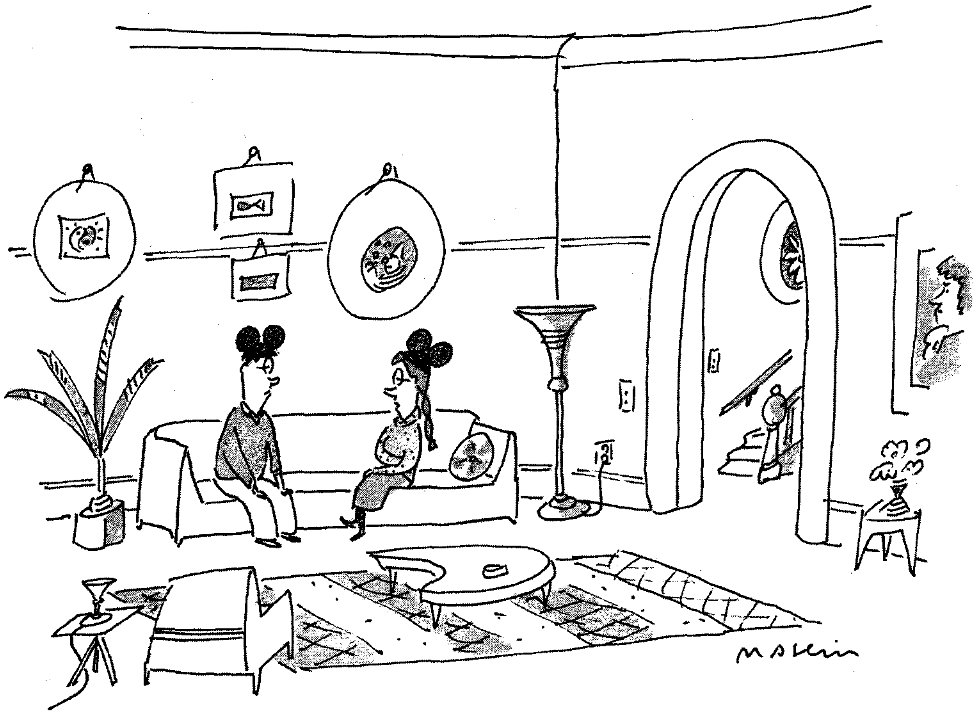
Grigorovich has a complex presence: born of an aristocratic family, he has secured considerable wealth, and yet there remains about him the austerity of the soldier-ascetic; he has made his life in public, yet he is a man of impenetrable privacy; he has a reputation for ruthlessness, yet even his enemies have attested to his charm. Dancers, and particularly those who have suffered his disregard, have said that the potency of his charm lies in the threat of its falling away—of its sudden, inexplicable withdrawal. Grigorovich told me that his grandfather was Florentine, and it struck me that if ever a man lived his life by the precepts of Niccolò Machiavelli it is Grigorovich.

At the time of our meeting, the Bolshoi was preparing to travel to Britain for a season at London's Royal Albert Hall. Although Grigorovich professed optimism about the tour, it was clear that he was more than a little apprehensive. Derek Block, the impresario who had organized the company's London season, was a pop-music promoter with no previous knowledge of ballet, and the Albert Hall (although it had occasionally been used as a dance venue) lacked a proscenium arch and conventional sight lines. The program—and here, Grigorovich admitted, lay the artistic risk—was to consist of "suites" cropped from his own major ballets. The company badly needed the season to be a success, and so did he. Since the collapse of Communism, and, with it, the underwriting of the Bolshoi by the state, the theatre had been in desperate straits. Many of the running costs had to be met with foreign currency, and the only means of acquiring this currency was through constant and exhausting overseas touring. Moreover, small breakaway groups of dancers—often incompetent, often with only the vaguest of affiliations to the theatre—had taken to touring under the Bolshoi banner, and had done incalculable damage to the reputation of the main company. There was a feeling on the international ballet circuit that the company's stars had become overavailable, he said; that their currency was devalued. Dancers of all ranks were leaving the company—Irek Mukhamedov for London and the Royal Ballet, Yuri Posokhov for Copenhagen and the Royal Danish Ballet, Lyudmila Semenyaka for the English National Ballet—in search of the salaries and life styles that post-Communist Russia could not pretend to match. Speaking of which, he continued a little sadly, had I seen Irek recently? How was he? Mukhamedov, I told him, was dancing well. His wife (known to her former Bolshoi colleagues as "Playboy" because she was so sexy) had had her baby. Grigorovich nodded moodily. This news only confirmed something he had said earlier: dancers always claimed that they had left the Bolshoi for artistic reasons, whereas they were really lured away by material satisfactions—expensive obstetrics in the case of the Mukhamedovs.

Free-world economics were a trick that Grigorovich didn't learn fast enough—unlike the Bolshoi's general manager, Vladimir Kokonin, whom I met later, at the theatre. Kokonin's ability to reinvent himself—to make the transition from apparatchik to market economist—guaranteed his ascendancy within a post-perestroika privatized Bolshoi. A neat, bespectacled figure in a dark post-Soviet suit, Kokonin is possessed of the unnerving charm of the professional communicator. He confided—his quick smile gave all his statements the air of personal confidences—that, like Grigorovich, he badly needed a successful tour. A recent decree had made it possible for the Bolshoi to keep all the fees it earned overseas, but even retaining a hundred per cent, he said wryly, the management would have no problem spending the money. Musical instruments, electronic equipment, fabrics, dyes—all these had to be imported and bought with hard currency. And there were too many salaries to be paid: the Bolshoi was constitutionally unable to downscale a vast and strongly unionized workforce, most of whose members regarded themselves as career-long appointees. "We want permission to hand out contracts," Kokonin explained with weary determination. "People are going to have to start justifying their salaries. We don't want timeserving civil-servant types."

And there was the building itself. During the Soviet era, the Bolshoi Theatre had been allowed to deteriorate to the point where the physical safety of those using it was threatened. The ancient stage mechanisms required extensive overhaul. On the building's exterior, large patches of brickwork were exposed, where the grayish-pink stucco had fallen away. And an underground river threatened the theatre's foundations. Saving the building would involve closing it, perhaps for as long as two years, and would cost many millions of dollars. All in all, Kokonin said, the situation was dire. "Art belongs to the world," he added. "It will be the world's loss if we are lost."

He spoke about Grigorovich. At that time, the chameleon-like Kokonin expressed considerable sympathy for the artistic director's position. He deplored the Royal Ballet's luring away of Mukhamedov. The action of Anthony Dowell (the artistic director of the Royal Ballet) had been *banditsky*—like robbery—even if served up with British politeness. "An art-



"I trust the changes at Disney will not affect our relationship."

ist toes the line, tells everyone that there is no one like Grigorovich," Kokonin said. "Then someone makes him an offer, and the moment the dancer has the contract in his pocket Grigorovich is a tyrant and a son of a bitch. Personally, I can forgive. But I cannot demand that others forgive. Next to betraying a parent, the worst is to betray a mentor. It costs a lot of heart to give an artist a career. I don't envy Grigorovich: he has suffered many losses. He will always have his detractors. They don't ask themselves what *he* has lived through—they just cry 'Stalin!' " At the time, Kokonin's words—and his concern for Grigorovich—seemed genuine enough.

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YURI NIKOLAYEVICH GRIGOROVICH was born in 1927, in Leningrad—originally St. Petersburg, where all the significant Russian choreographers of the twentieth century began their professional lives. His maternal uncle George Rozai was a dancer for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, and at an early age Yuri was dispatched to Agrippina Vaganova's classes at the Leningrad Choreographic School. There, in the nineteen-twenties, Vaganova had developed the technique—restrained of line, yet lending itself to bravura—that helped propel the dancers of the Maryinsky (later Kirov) ballet to greatness. (It was for the Maryinsky that, in the late nineteenth century, the French dancer and choreographer Marius Petipa created "Swan Lake," "Sleeping Beauty," "The Nutcracker," and other ballets that have formed the basis of the classical repertoire ever since.) Grigorovich studied at the academy until the outbreak of war against Germany, when the school was evacuated to Kostroma, and later to Perm. From there, at fourteen, he ran away to the front, hoping to fight. He was returned to Perm, and at the end of the war the school was reëstablished in Leningrad, where, at the age of twenty—and by now a Kirov soloist—he choreographed a short ballet. Agrippina Vaganova watched its performance. "Stolen from everywhere" was her verdict, "but talented!"

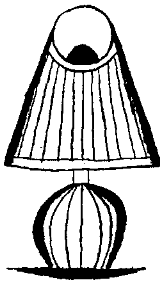
The Kirov's director at the time, Fyodor Lopukhov, encouraged the young soloist's wish to choreograph. As a dancer, Grigorovich specialized in dark character roles—"domineering, controlling roles, often brandishing a whip," as he described them to me—and his compositions displayed a precocious range. In 1957 (the year in which, on the other side of the world, Balanchine mounted his plotless "Agon"), Lopukhov invited Grigorovich to choreograph a three-act ballet to the music of Prokofiev. The result, based on a folktale from the Urals, was called "The Stone Flower." Mikhail Baryshnikov, who was dancing with the Kirov then, told me it was "a beautiful work" and his favorite of Grigorovich's ballets, though he had never had a chance to dance in it. It was a spectacular public success, and two years later Grigorovich was invited to remount it for the Bolshoi, in Moscow. In 1961, he choreographed the orientalist "Legend of Love"—again initially for the Kirov, then for the Bolshoi—and again had a popular success. (Grigorovich had intended the principal male role in "Legend of Love," that of Ferkhad, for Rudolf Nureyev, and when Nureyev's luggage was returned to Leningrad after his defection in Paris, it contained a bolt of blue material that he had bought for the costume.)

The scale of these early ballets was unashamedly epic. Their subjects—the moral condition, the fatal rendings between love, duty, and power—nodded to Soviet ideology, but they managed to transcend it and succeed on their own terms, as human drama. Earlier choreographers had addressed such conflicts—indeed, the Soviet repertoire of the forties and fifties dealt with little else—but Grigorovich introduced a sweep and pace that immediately made the earlier, more ponderous canon seem archaic. In 1964, he was appointed the Bolshoi's chief choreographer and artistic director, and over the next decade—during which he produced "Sleeping Beauty," "Legend of Love," "The Nutcracker," "Spartacus," "Swan Lake," and "Ivan the Terrible"—the theatre was vitalized by his energy.

The time was right: politically, the moment was one of relative thaw, and the public was eager for the new. The streamlined Grigorovich ballets represented a huge stylistic advance. At the same time, Grigorovich knew that he had to both satisfy the state and retain his traditionalist audience. Russia had no non-narrative ballet tradition, and although neoclassicism and abstraction were firmly established elsewhere (Balanchine had choreographed "Apollo" in 1928 and Frederick Ashton his "Symphonic Variations" in 1946), the Grigorovich repertoire was to remain resolutely untouched by either. "Fine for them," he explained to me in his Moscow office, gesturing vaguely westward. "Not for us!" My own memory of the company at this time is that the most moving choreography coexisted with the most dated and embarrassingly contrived. Cultural isolation had induced visual anachronism, and, for the Western viewer, a perceptual shift was necessary. For the best to reveal itself, I discovered, you had to change gears, to engage in a deliberate suspension of ironic Western knowingness. Grigorovich's 1966 production of "The Nutcracker," for example, while studded with pantomime vulgarities, remains to my eyes the most genuinely magical of the many versions performed.

The dancers themselves embodied a spirit of invincibility that Communism couldn't suppress. Chief among them was Vasiliev. Sombre by nature but possessed onstage of a lucent nobility and an apparently effortless virtuosity, he projected a sense—particularly compelling to Soviet audiences—that beyond the bleakness of the present waited an age of gold. The three great ballerinas of the era were Natalia Bessmertnova, Ekaterina Maximova, and the flamboyant Plisetskaya. Plisetskaya is older than the others (she was born in 1925 and joined the company in 1943) and thus cannot truly be considered a Grigorovich ballerina. She nevertheless exerted a considerable dramatic presence during his heyday, and until the late sixties her performances of roles like Odette-Odile, in "Swan Lake," and Kitri, in "Don Quixote," had an unparalleled sexual dazzle. Bessmertnova joined the company nearly twenty years later, and, in contrast to the Plisetskaya flash finish, she offered a lyrical, vulnerable femininity. If there is an ideal of womanhood to be discerned in the ballets of Grigorovich, Bessmertnova—whom he married in 1968—represented it. Mysterious, forever obedient to her sad destiny, it seemed that she gazed out far beyond the audience to a vision that only she could see.

If audiences thrilled to Plisetskaya and wondered at Bessmertnova's ethereality, they simply adored Maximova. A pretty Muscovite, she had her first solo role at the Bolshoi in 1959, as Katerina in "The Stone Flower." Captivating from the first, Maximova acquired a devoted following. She had married Vasiliev just out of ballet school—he was the best-looking nineteen-year-old in Moscow—and, riding the flood tide of Grigorovich's inventiveness, the couple embarked on one of the great partnerships in ballet history. "Yuri Nikolayevich would come to the creation of a ballet with his own musical and choreographic ideas," Vasiliev recalled when asked about those years, "but he was prepared to listen to the opinion of anyone involved with the piece. Everything was always open to discussion. It was a good time."



EVEN in the more open Brezhnev era, the first two decades of Grigorovich's directorship were a time of absolute artistic isolation for the Soviet Union, and one in which all creative endeavor incompatible with the attitudes of the state was suppressed. In 1968, Grigorovich obliged the Ministry of Culture with "Spartacus." This ballet, which told the story of the unsuccessful slave uprising led by a Thracian gladiator against Roman oppressors in 71 B.C., became a flagship Bolshoi production: it displayed the four-sided construction favored by Grigorovich—good man, good woman; evil man, evil woman—and the familiar themes of power and the necessity of sacrifice. This time, however, folklore was abandoned for a thunderous historicity, as phrase after crashing phrase was beaten upon the anvil of Khachaturian's score, and Grigorovich delivered stage-devouring leaps, pyrotechnic lifts, and a goose-stepping corps of legionnaires. In an unforgettable final tableau—a secular crucifixion—Spartacus was hoisted high above his executioners, his body impaled on the points of countless spears. Only the Bolshoi could have danced this ballet (the role of Spartacus was embodied by Vasiliev), and only the Bolshoi would have wished to. It expressed the qualities that Grigorovich had made his own: darkness, fatalism, and weight. Even as they soar, Grigorovich's protagonists are in chains, heavy with corruption or the foreknowledge of death. Audiences, particularly in the West, reacted to this extreme application of ballet with stunned amazement. Although impeccably Soviet on the surface, the allegory worked both ways: was it the brave Thracians or the fascistic Roman legions who represented the Soviet state?

Grigorovich was playing dangerous games, and it wasn't long before the state called his bluff and insisted that he make an overt ideological statement in his work. The breaking point came later that year, when he was preparing his "Swan Lake." This was to have been a psychological and ultimately pessimistic rendering, in which the hero, Prince Siegfried, and the villain, von Rothbart, would be presented as doppelgängers—warring halves of a single personality. But this time Grigorovich was not permitted the luxury of ambiguity. A censor from the Ministry of Culture was shown a dress rehearsal of the new production, a report was made, and major alterations, including a happy ending, were demanded. (The apparatchiks, according to Grigorovich, also disliked the pared-down two-act structure he had employed, as it provided them with fewer breaks in which to visit the bar.) Initially, he refused to make changes, and the ballet, which had been scheduled to have its première in London that July, was shelved. When it was shown in Moscow, six months later, however, the required changes had been made. "Something broke," the Moscow critic Elizabeth Souritz says. "He compromised. And one compromise leads to another." A quarter of a century later, the modification of his "Swan Lake" remains a painful subject for Grigorovich. "Next time, I'll do it differently," he told me wryly, but he refused to comment further.

The censor, Ekaterina Furtseva, continued as a sporadic but baleful presence at the Bolshoi Theatre until she fell from Brezhnev's favor, in the mid-seventies; she was discovered dead—poisoned—in her apartment. "I'm not sure she really even believed in Communism," Grigorovich said. "She just flew the Party kite. With hindsight, one can see she was just as much a victim of the situation as we all were."

Grigorovich's creative spine may have been broken—his work would never again achieve the vitality and conviction of his early ballets—but he enjoyed power too much to walk away, and he began to incur the criticism of his own dancers. He got into trouble in 1975, when he produced "Ivan the Terrible," the grimmest of all his ballets. Choreographically, the production was praised, but elements of the Moscow intelligentsia damned its theme—that of long-term good born of evil—as dangerously Stalinist. Grigorovich denies that the ballet was ideologically motivated, and compares it, as a straightforward study of corruption and power, to Shakespeare's "Richard III." Disapproval of "Ivan," however, served to unite two increasingly discontented forces: Vasiliev and Plisetskaya. Vasiliev, looking to a future beyond dancing, was attempting to establish himself as a choreographer; in 1971, he had produced "Icarus"—to mixed critical reactions—and Grigorovich had not been encouraging. Plisetskaya had long considered herself underused as a dancer, and she bitterly resented Grigorovich's active discouragement of her choreographic effort, "Anna Karenina," three years earlier. A caucus of opposition led by Plisetskaya and Vasiliev—and, by extension, Maximova, Vasiliev's wife—came into being, and by the late seventies the antagonism of these dancers to the autocratic Grigorovich had caused an irreconcilable rift.

What Grigorovich's opponents really wanted, of course, was more exposure for themselves and their own work. And if Grigorovich didn't support their work in part because the work wasn't especially good, he was equally interested in remaining the sole and omnipotent choreographer. He could have kept Plisetskaya, Vasiliev, and Maximova in line by flattering them as dancers, but he made the mistake of sidelining them, invoking their ages as the reason. (At the time, thirty-eight—or twenty years after graduation from ballet school—was considered the upper age limit for dancers.) Plisetskaya, Vasiliev, and Maximova, however, felt that they had contributed too much to the Bolshoi's success to be passed over merely on the basis of age. They and their supporters accused Grigorovich of favoritism, blacklisting, artistic conservatism, and collusion with the "forces of repression."

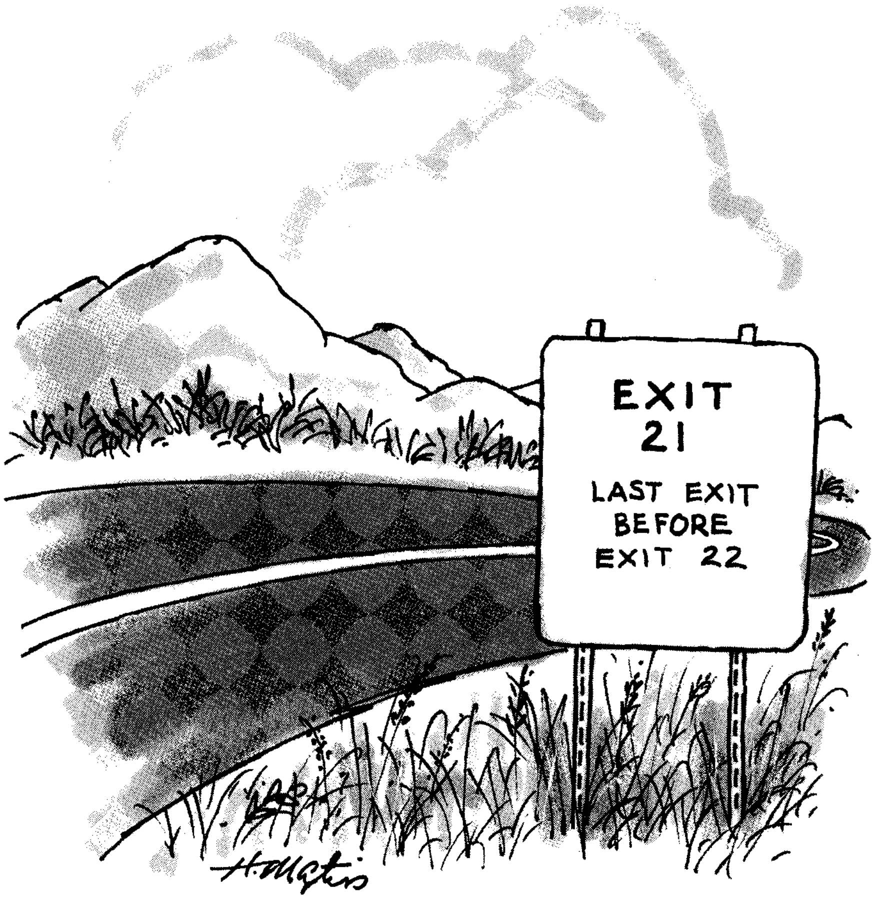
In 1976, Grigorovich went too far in pleasing the state when he produced a ballet—certainly his worst, which he now effectively admits—about the emotional vagaries of a dam-construction team in Irkutsk. "Angara" was recently described to me by Vasiliev as "*Koshmar*—a nightmare." Vasiliev was persuaded to take the lead role, but denounced the work.

Plisetskaya, by this time, was going her own way. She was still officially a ballerina of the company, but she refused to dance Grigorovich's work, appearing instead in a series of dubious vehicles of her own devising. These—"Anna Karenina," "The Seagull," "The Lady and the Lapdog," choreographed by her, and "Carmen Suite," choreographed by the Cuban dancer and choreographer Alberto Alonso—were not praised to her satisfaction, but Plisetskaya persisted. ("*Kritiki!* Shit!" was her not untypical reaction to poor notices at Covent Garden.)

In 1979, Grigorovich's "Romeo and Juliet" provoked a further crisis. The dancers expressed bitter resentment that the director had discarded the superior Leonid Lavrovsky production with which the Bolshoi had conquered the West in the nineteen-fifties. A deputation consisting of Vasiliev, Maximova, the actor-dancer Maris Liepa, and Lavrovsky's son Mikhail, who was a Bolshoi principal, demanded that the Ministry of Culture reinstate the original, and it was granted a brief reprieve. The atmosphere, however, remained poisoned, and in 1979 and 1980 there was a series of defections, which included the teacher Sulamif Messerer (Plisetskaya's aunt) and the character soloist Aleksandr Godunov.

The Soviet government was badly shaken by these incidents, especially when the detention at Kennedy Airport of Godunov's ballerina wife developed into a diplomatic incident. The Politburo ordered the Ministry of Culture to sort things out once and for all, and an acrimonious meeting at the Bolshoi Theatre followed, with Grigorovich denying the existence of a rift in the company and suggesting that it was time for some of his older opponents to retire, and Plisetskaya denouncing him as a liar. Somewhat helplessly, the Deputy Minister ordered an end to the meeting and to further quarrelling.

Over the years that followed, the company remained split between those who saw Grigorovich as the best hope for their future and those who sympathized with his opponents. Irek Mukhamedov, now a Royal Ballet principal, then a Grigorovich protégé, recalls not daring for years to attend Asaf Messerer's classes, because of the teacher's association with Plisetskaya: "When I finally went, there was Vasiliev, there was Plisetskaya—these great dancers—but I couldn't join in their jokes or laughter,

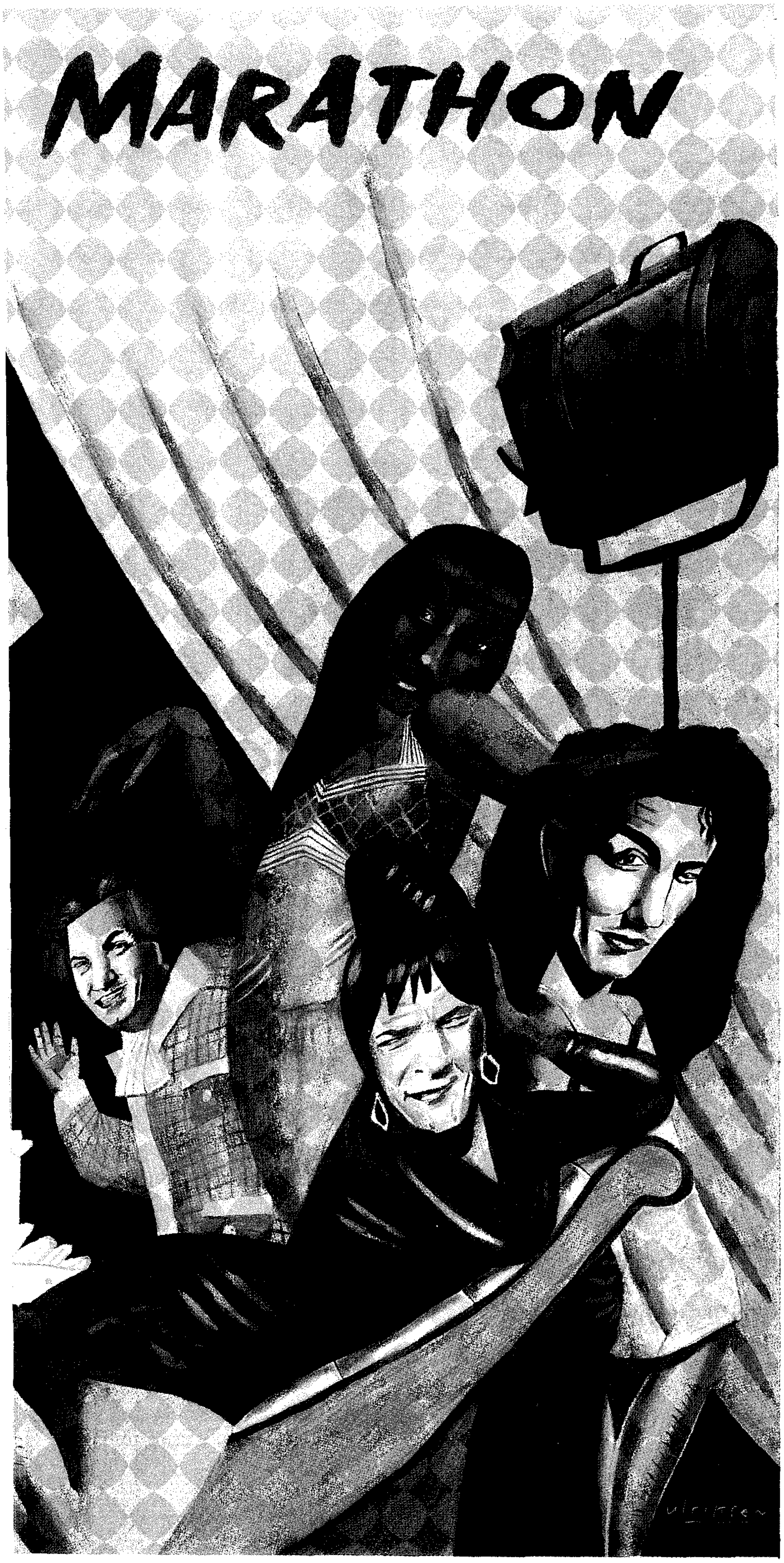


THE DRAG-RA

because I knew that if I wanted to progress I had to say in public that these people were no good, were too old. In my whole time with the Bolshoi, I never spoke to Plisetskaya once. Not even a simple hello. There was so much that they could have taught me, but I couldn't take their help. And now I wonder, why couldn't we all have been more . . . human?"

GIVEN the time that Grigorovich chose to devote to the politics of his own survival, it is not surprising that he produced little new work. His last major ballet was "The Golden Age," staged in 1982—a tale of love and gangsterism (a kind of Crimean "Cotton Club"), set in the nineteen-twenties of Lenin's New Economic Policy. The ballet was a considerable success, although Grigorovich's detractors claimed that it smacked of Soviet orthodoxy. In fact, Grigorovich was back to his ambiguous fence-sitting; the ballet can be read just as easily as a critique of Sovietism. What were Grigorovich's true intentions? Perhaps even he no longer knew.

The cast of "The Golden Age"—with the exception of Grigorovich's wife,



"I HATE drag, but I love comedy," the director Mike Nichols says. His comment shows that Nichols, who's doing a remake of "La Cage aux Folles," with Nathan Lane, remains attuned to the Zeitgeist. After a decade (from "Tootsie" to "The Crying Game") in which men dressed as women in order to explore sexual attraction or to make personal discoveries, movies have returned to a safer, frothier, more classically comic use of men dressed as women. The latest acts in the floor show (left to right): the Lady Bunny (coming soon in "Wigstock: The Movie"); Nichols and Lane; Arnold Schwarzenegger ("Junior"); Johnny Depp ("Ed Wood"); Hugo Weaving, Terence Stamp, and Guy Pearce ("The Adventures of Priscilla Queen of the Desert"); Danny Aiello ("Ready to Wear"); and Wesley Snipes, Patrick Swayze, and John Leguizamo (in the forthcoming "To Wong Foo").

Bessmertnova, who, at forty-two, continued serene and unchallenged as the company's prima ballerina—was drawn from a younger generation of principals. These dancers had their own ideas and ambitions, and, in most cases, little time for what one of their number described to me as "old battles, old histories, and old dancers."

Over the years, the anti-establishment posture of Vasiliev, Plisetskaya, and the rest had become as institutional and self-perpetuating as Grigorovich himself. The conflict defined them. They now performed only rarely in Moscow, and maintained extensive overseas commitments. But time and bitterness had taken their toll. In 1980, rumors of a divorce between Maximova and Vasiliev were published in the Western press, and four years later Maximova survived an apparent suicide attempt; she was discovered unconscious, her wrists slashed, in a hotel bathroom in Sardinia. (In Bolshoi circles, the incident is never referred to.) Plisetskaya's performances, if brave—she had suffered for many years from arthritis—became sad echoes of her triumphant ballerina past. Liepa, beloved of Moscow audiences as the virile Crassus, in "Spartacus," but increasingly alcoholic in his later years, was summarily retired by Grigorovich in 1982, when he was forty-six. An appeal to the Ministry of Culture won him a final farewell performance, before he departed, brokenhearted, to Bulgaria, to become the director of the national ballet company there. Seven years later, after being admitted to a public hospital, he died.

In January of 1989, encouraged by the atmosphere of glasnost, which made public criticism of Grigorovich possible, a deputation headed by Vasiliev and Mikhail Lavrovsky called a meeting to put their demands—basically, the departure of Grigorovich—to Kokonin, who was by then the Bolshoi's general director. Grigorovich fielded his own team, headed by Mukhamedov, and the twenty-eight-year-old Tatar tore into the massed ranks of the Old Guard. Accusing them of troublemaking and betrayal, he wrote off the former stars as yesterday's men and women. Kokonin, who at the time perceived his own interests to be compatible with Grigorovich's survival, was delighted. Before the meeting dispersed, however, a grim-faced Lavrovsky predicted that it would not be long before Mukhamedov would find himself among the aggrieved. In March, the Tatar accompanied Grigorovich to Communist Party headquarters, and there the director received assurances of support from Gorbachev. But by May of the next year, with an American tour approaching in which he was to receive top billing, Mukhamedov had defected.

The Bolshoi Ballet's 1993 London season was a mixed success. The auditorium was filled every night, but the program was panned, with the "ballet suite" concept singled out for scathing criticism. However, as Grigorovich, bloodied, returned to Moscow, the impresario Derek Block, having made them a profit to the tune of nearly two million pounds, was bullish. Congratulating himself on the success of his marketing strategy ("We went for sexy ads and stayed away from the white tutus"), he announced that the Bolshoi would be undertaking further tours in association with him, most specifically a "Grand Tour" of Britain in the summer of 1994.

One of the artists billed to appear was Gedeminas Taranda, a principal character dancer whose performances displayed an attractive muscular panache. Grigorovich had given him lead roles in several of his ballets, but an instinctive antipathy existed between the two men, and last January Taranda took sick leave from the company and embarked on a well-paid unofficial performance tour in Holland. Grigorovich's position was difficult. To take cognizance of Taranda's rule-bending absence was to concede the necessity of the contract system, which threatened Grigorovich's permanent tenure as director; yet to ignore Taranda's absence was to compromise his authority completely.

Then, on the evening of a performance in mid-February, as the orchestra was tuning up, Taranda, who was not performing that night, walked onto the apron of the Bolshoi Theatre. "I want to say goodbye to you all," he began. He thanked his fellow-dancers, the orchestra, and the audience. After his thirteen years as a soloist, he announced, the direction had seen fit to dismiss him. There was a stunned silence in the auditorium. Onstage, in full makeup for the performance, Taranda's brother, Vytautas, struggled to prevent the security guards from reaching Taranda through the heavy red-and-gold curtain. As Taranda took his seat, pandemonium broke out. The dancer's dismissal, Kokonin would later announce, was for being "absent from work . . . without valid reason."

The other dancers got the message. "Taranda had star-sickness," Vladimir Moiseyev, a fellow character principal, observed. "He thought he could do anything." But, for Grigorovich, Taranda's forcing of his hand was a Pyrrhic victory at best. Taranda was a popular draw, and if he had rid the director of a long-time irritant, he had become one more voice prepared to shout "Stalin!" to the international press.

By the end of June, it was clear that the bookings for the "Grand Tour 1994" of England had failed to materialize. The Bolshoi was at last beginning to suffer the consequences of its decline—it no longer seemed exotic, and it had to compete with other commercial companies. Apparently the English audience wasn't interested this time around. An embarrassingly small number of tickets was sold, and the scale of the project dwindled until, estimating his personal losses at one and a quarter million pounds, Block announced the venture's failure. For the Bolshoi, the collapse of the tour represented not only a stinging humiliation but a turning point. Never in its history had the company suffered a rejection of this kind. The finger of blame was unhesitatingly pointed at Grigorovich, who, it seemed, had allowed himself to be persuaded into making a series of wholly inadvisable artistic decisions. In fact, what the tour's failure had proved was that the idea of the Bolshoi Ballet as a wonder of the world was no more. The legend had depended in large part on the comparative rarity of the company's appearances. With glasnost, and the sudden ubiquity of Soviet-trained dancers, the legend was unsustainable.

The attitude of critics to the Bolshoi has changed as well. For many years, even the most acerbic critics—sympathetic, perhaps, to the dancers' political predicament—were silent about the shortcomings of certain performers, choosing, instead, to praise the best. Now that the Bolshoi is just another commercial company, that silence can no longer be relied upon, and the truth is that, despite the continuing excellence of male dancers, a shortage of ballerinas has led to some desperate promotions in the company's ranks.

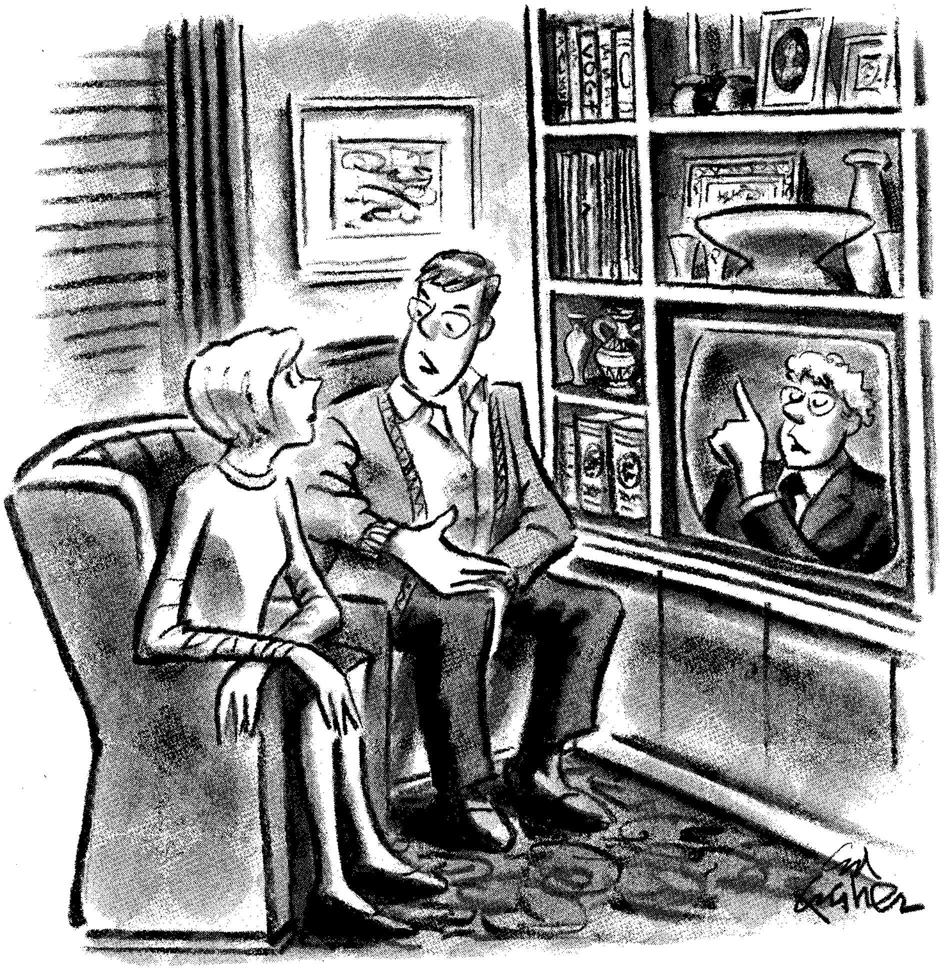
With a few exceptions, there are now no major ballerinas at the Bolshoi. The most technically accomplished are Nadezhda Gracheva and Nadezhda Pavlova. Gracheva, who is twenty-four, can do everything: she dispatches the most demanding variations with cool science, a high, soft line, and an apparently nerveless lack of restraint. She is utterly reliable, but marred by a coldness that speaks of too much, too soon. Nadezhda Pavlova, by contrast, is a dancer of prodigious natural gifts, who promised to become the greatest Soviet ballerina of her generation. In 1973, at seventeen, she danced at the annual International Ballet Competition in Perm, where her performance of variations from "The Nutcracker" displayed a joyously unconfined technique and the precisely pitched suspension between enchanted childhood and womanhood that the role of Clara requires. The jury, headed by Grigorovich, awarded her the Grand Prix. By 1975, she was the Bolshoi's youngest ballerina. Somehow, though, almost as if she remained imprisoned in that half-child, half-woman role, things never quite came right for Pavlova, and she gained a reputation, which she retains, for unreliability.

Last spring, a month before her thirty-eighth birthday, I saw Pavlova's name on a Bolshoi rehearsal schedule for "Giselle" and asked if I could watch. "Nadezhda is a very naughty girl," I was told by a company representative. "Very difficult. You don't want to watch her." I insisted that I did want to, and was eventually accompanied to a studio, to find Pavlova's partner staring expressionlessly out the window and the rehearsal pianist waiting in diplomatic silence, his hands folded in his lap. Pavlova was sitting on a bench in front of the mirror, with a black crossover knotted loosely over her rehearsal tutu, staring in mute despair at the floor. At our entrance, briefly startled, she looked up at me. "Would Nadezhda Vasilievna . . . ?" I began, but slowly, hopelessly, Pavlova shook her head. "See how naughty she is!" I was told as the studio door closed behind us. "She won't rehearse. She's a very, very, *very* naughty girl."

"It's just exhaustion, sweetie. Everybody's got it."

One dancer who could have become a useful Bolshoi ballerina was Svetlana Filippova. In 1992, as a highly promising twenty-three-year-old soloist, Filippova found that she was systematically being denied roles that she had been led to believe she might expect to dance. When she inquired of the casting department why this was so, she was curtly informed that she would not be allowed to dance solo, only in pas de quatre or in pas de six. The next season, her name was entirely absent from cast lists. Again, she was given no reason, and finally she handed in her notice. She is now a leading ballerina with the Kremlin company. Insiders suggest that Filippova was the victim of a factional rivalry much older than herself. This vendetta—not the only one of its kind—highlights the fatal distance that had grown up between Grigorovich and the middle rank of his dancers, and the sacrifices he was willing to make to hold on to his power. When Filippova appealed to him, his response was that her situation was "nothing to do with me." The Bolshoi's casting directors supported Grigorovich unfailingly ("They were his eyes in the theatre," Mukhamedov told me), and the reward for their loyalty was the freedom to pursue their private agendas.

Another reason for the Bolshoi's ballerina shortage is to be found at the institution known as MAKHU (Moskovsky Akademichesky Khoreografichesky Uchilishche). Historically, MAKHU has provided the Bolshoi with most of its great dancers. In the last three and a half decades, however—a period that coincides with the regime of its present di-



"When did everything essential become quintessential?"

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rector, who is known for her willingness to accommodate the relatives of Party high-ups as students—it has not supplied a single lyric ballerina. "There are so few lyrical dancers," the ex-Bolshoi star and teacher Marina Semyonova confided to me during a rehearsal with Galina Stepanenko, a ballerina who brings a hard-eyed professionalism to her roles and has a brassy facility for fouetté turns. Semyonova went on, "They turn out technical dancers like a mincing machine, but . . ." She turned to Stepanenko, who in addition to a baby-pink rehearsal outfit was wearing pearls, a gold watch, and bejewelled earrings. "Galyusha!" she implored. "That's *not* poetic. Make your position *beautiful*."

Grigorovich has insisted that there is no qualitative difference between Stepanenko et al., and Maximova, Bessmertnova, and Plisetskaya. There is one, however: dancers of the earlier generation were taught better, prepared for long-term ballerina careers rather than merely to bash out "Le Corsaire" on the competition circuit. They did dance better, and plentiful film exists to prove it. When I visited MAKHU, I asked a class of the tiniest girls who their favorite dancers were. The girls, all of whom seemed to be called Nastia (a diminutive of Anastasia), twisted their fingers and darted nervous glances at their teacher. Finally, one of the Nastias spoke. "Maximova," she said quietly but decisively. "We want to dance like Maximova." Gradually, the others began to nod, and soon they were all nodding and repeating, as if for the sibilant pleasure of her name, "Maximova, Maximova, Maximova."

WITH the collapse of the 1994 British tour, Kokonin—capitalizing on Grigorovich's weak moment—revealed the full extent of his metamorphosis from party bureaucrat to corporate C.E.O. In July, in the Moscow newspaper *Vecherny Klub*, he announced that he intended to introduce a contract system for Bolshoi employees from which neither Grigorovich nor Yevgeny Raykov (the opera director) nor Aleksandr Lazarev (the chief conductor of the orchestra) would be exempt. The article's implication was that all three were eminently replaceable. Taranda, the character dancer fired five months earlier, turned out in support of Kokonin, as did other anti-Grigorovich critics. The Bolshoi was compared with "a collective farm" in which its employees were "chattels." Many of those chattels, however, with much to lose and little to gain from a contract system, responded differently to Kokonin's words. What they were witnessing was a straightforward power play. "We realized we could not remain uncommitted," Marina Starostina, an employee of the ballet office, says. "We had to take sides—Grigorovich or Kokonin. Neutrality was impossible." The atmosphere was more poisonous than ever. It was assumed by many that all the telephones in the theatre, both internal and external, were tapped.

Although there was a small group of hard-core reformist dancers, the majority were unequivocal. Grigorovich should remain in place, they said, and Kokonin should occupy himself with fund-raising and painting the walls. (In fact, quite possibly intending a certain irony, Kokonin did just that. There is a small dancers' canteen near the ballet office which, until last summer, was a comfortable steam-filled corner decorated with curling photographs of Maximova and Vasiliev. When I revisited in November, the walls were powder-pink, Maximova and Vasiliev had gone, and the erstwhile dried fish had been replaced by caviar sandwiches. Outside the window, needless to say, the masonry continued to crumble from the walls.)

Grigorovich retaliated against Kokonin with a letter to Boris Yeltsin written by him, Raykov, and Lazarev, which drew the President's attention to the "abyss of misunderstanding" between "the creators" and "the bureaucrat." The writers damned the latter's "passivity," "incompetent administration," and "interference in the creative sphere." Kokonin also wrote to the President, and his letter found the greater favor. (Given Grigorovich's association with Gorbachev, this was less than surprising.) On July 7th, Yeltsin's chief of staff informed the news agency Tass that under a pending decree the Bolshoi was to be given a new employment plan, based on a contract system and on "competition."

For six weeks, nothing happened, and then, in the last week of August, an undignified wrangle was reported. In St. Petersburg, Maya Plisetskaya, ever provocative, had instituted an event to be known as the First International Maya Dance Competition. Like all her projects, it was a combination of self-promotion, doubtful taste, and irresistible rebellious charm. Competitors were to choreograph and dance to a theme that symbolized Plisetskaya's resistance to Grigorovich and the Bolshoi establishment: the theme of Carmen. (The music, to which all competitors were to dance, had been composed by Plisetskaya's husband, Rodion Shchedrin.) Grigorovich forbade his dancers to take part in the event, and it was clear from their absence that most Russian dancers considered it politic to sit the competition out and allow foreigners to take the prizes. One, however, Ekaterina Kovmir, of the Maryinsky (formerly Kirov) Ballet, had no such reservations, and Plisetskaya's jury awarded her a special prize for the independence of her action.

The Maya Competition in St. Petersburg was followed almost immediately by the Echo of Moscow radio announcement concerning Plisetskaya, and the President's attention was finally diverted from issues of national security to those of ballet. In the first week of September, he signed the promised "contracts" decree, and the management of the theatre was permanently assigned to the general director (in this case, Kokonin), who was thenceforth permitted "to appoint his or her deputies and artistic directors on a competitive and contractual basis." On September 10th, a notice to this effect, signed by the Prime Minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, was pinned to the notice board outside the Bolshoi Theatre's ballet office.

The next day, Grigorovich, fearing his days to be numbered now that Kokonin possessed such extensive powers of hire-and-fire, had himself driven from his apartment to the Bolshoi Theatre, and there he handed in a preliminary letter of resignation.

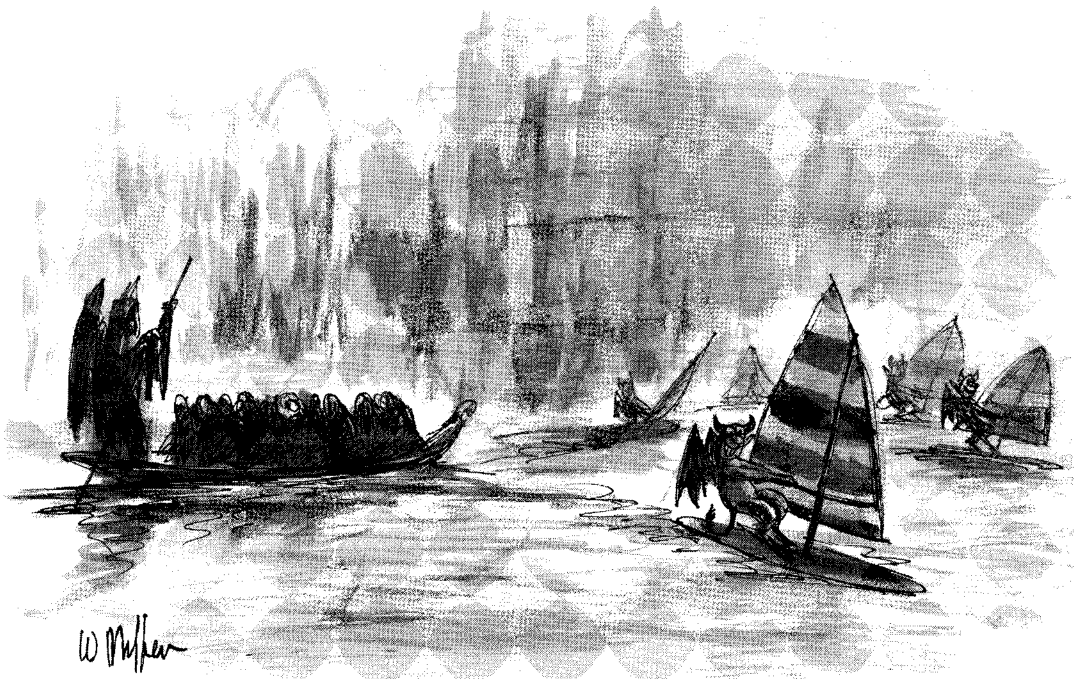
"HE'LL be there for the rest of his life," Maya Plisetskaya told me two weeks later. "He's had the letter of resignation in his pocket for thirty years but he's *still* not gone." It was a clear September afternoon, and I met the former ballerina at her apartment in Munich, where her husband teaches and composes. We walked to an Italian café nearby, sat at a pavement table, and ordered espresso. She wore an olive-green silk shirt and narrow black trousers, and she was still beautiful—her eyes long and dark, her oval face poised in expectation of my questions.

I asked if she wished to become director of the Bolshoi Ballet. "*People* wished it," she replied with a little smile. "There was no official invitation, but it was reported everywhere—on TV, on the radio, in the papers. At the moment, it's impossible to work at the Bolshoi Theatre, because *Sovietsky vlast*—Soviet power—is still in existence there. And there are no dancers, because there's no repertoire. Just one dictator, like Stalin." (When Plisetskaya was thirteen, in 1938, Stalin had her father shot and her mother imprisoned. "They apologized later," she told me flatly. "They said, 'We made a mistake.' ") Sentence by unhurried sentence, she laid out her case against Grigorovich. He was a tyrant, she explained. His attitude: *L'état, c'est moi.* "He thinks only of himself and his own productions. He's been like that from the start, but, to begin with, none of us realized it. He made two great ballets—'The Stone Flower' and 'Legend of Love'—and then he quickly became creatively impotent." In favor of his own work, she continued, he threw out her uncle Asaf Messerer's "Swan Lake," Zakharov's "Fountain of Bakhchisarai" and "Cinderella," and Lavrovsky's "Romeo and Juliet." About the last, she said with particular rancor, there was no argument. "He just chucked it out. We had to say that he was a genius and the others were all *govno*—shit."

When we met for lunch the next day, Plisetskaya gave me a signed copy of her memoirs, which were by then heading the Moscow best-seller list. "Every *dog* in Moscow," she told me triumphantly, "recognizes Maya Plisetskaya!"

Plisetskaya had no good word for Grigorovich. "He is the sort of man who would have set up a labor camp. Give him a pistol and . . ." She mimed a long, shuddering trigger pull.

THE response to Grigorovich's letter of resignation was a phone call from the Ministry of Culture inviting him to a meeting on September 16th.



Grigorovich replied that he was leaving for Sydney, Australia, on the thirteenth, where the company was about to begin a tour. He had written to Kokonin, he said, to inform the general director that after his return from Australia he would no longer be serving the Bolshoi Ballet. In Moscow, three days after Grigorovich's pre-tour departure, a secret vote of the ballet collective was held: Should Grigorovich remain as artistic director of the Bolshoi Ballet? The majority of the company's two hundred and thirty-seven members—probably fearing for their jobs under Kokonin's get-tough contract policy—voted for Grigorovich.

A few days after the company's return from Australia, Grigorovich flew to London. He had told the Bolshoi that he was going to see Derek Block, but in fact he was in Europe, establishing a fall-back position—teaching or directing—in case his bluff was called.

Grigorovich told me that at this stage he had received no official response to his resignation, but it had been suggested to him that in addition to the "Don Quixote" he was then mounting he might want to mark his Thirtieth Jubilee, which fell on December 25th, by devoting the entire month of December to his ballets. He was distrustful of the management, however—especially when it was bearing gifts. The Jubilee season was calculated so that it would finish by the New Year, and January 1st was the official date for the initiation of the contract system. The whole idea sounded depressingly valedictory.

If you go, I asked him, who do you think would best succeed you? After some thought, and with a certain bleak amusement, he startled me by naming Vasiliev. He explained that, in the end, his longtime rival was the only plausible candidate: Oleg Vinogradov (the director of the Maryinsky Ballet) was otherwise occupied, while Vyacheslev Gordeyev (the ex-husband of the ballerina Nadezhda Pavlova and now a touring-group director) was too much of a *durak*—an idiot—and Plisetskaya was simply impossible. And what about Taranda, I asked. "If I conduct a conflict with Vasiliev or Plisetskaya, that is one thing," Grigorovich said, almost nostalgically. "But to descend to fighting with character soloists"—his voice hardened—"is quite another. Gedeminas Taranda is nothing more than a piece of heavy furniture."

He spoke of Nureyev, whom he knew well from the pre-defection days and had met again in Athens shortly before the dancer's death. "I said to Rudolf, 'Have you ever made any mistakes?' He said, 'None!' But if I think about my own life, I can't say the same thing. We—Nureyev and I—got well and truly drunk that night. Everyone we talked about was dead, but he never said a word to me about being ill. I asked him what his future was. He said, 'I'll be out selling myself—what do you think? Stay at home and count my money?' " Grigorovich shook his head in sympathy. His own position, he was aware, was impossible to calculate. He had preëmpted Kokonin with his resignation, but then almost three-quarters of the dancers had demanded that he remain. "I'm not the Bolshoi anymore"—he spread his hands ironically—"so who am I?"

IN December, when Vladimir Vasiliev was in Paris, serving on the jury of a ballet competition, I met him at his hotel, on the Boulevard Haussmann. "Things can't go on as they are," he told me when I asked him about the Bolshoi. "Changes must be made." Vasiliev, now fifty-four, is as courteous and handsome as ever, but—unlike Grigorovich, who on some level is vitalized by conflict—he seems withdrawn and opaque. The years and the bitterness have shadowed him. He had always denied that he wished to take Grigorovich's place, but now he admitted the fact. "I've got two choices," he explained. "To stay silent or to get up on the podium, talk, and fight. Well, I'm not a soldier, and I'm just too occupied for all that self-promotion. But people are aware that I'm prepared to step in—they're aware that I'm clean and that I want nothing for myself, merely to serve the theatre." His qualifications, he went on, with the patient air of one who has said it before and will say it again, were that he had already worked at the Bolshoi for forty years and thus had no career to build, no profit to make.

"The hardest thing for me, if I got the job," he continued, "would be to put a brake on my own creativity." Vasiliev has choreographed a handful of medium-scale pieces, and has plans for more extensive work, which, he said with delicate emphasis, would require the full Bolshoi Ballet cast and facilities. "I was insulted when Grigorovich stopped creating ballets on me and pensioned me off," he said, "but I've managed to create much more myself as a result." His suggestion, however, was that a statute of limitations should forbid any artistic director to choreograph for the company. If they wished to do so, their authority should be temporarily transferred. If he himself were to become director, he said, he would invite senior-statesman choreographers like Maurice Béjart, Jerome Robbins, and Jiri Kylian to Moscow. He added the names of three Russians—Eifman, Panfilov, Alexidze—and mused politely upon the possibilities of the younger English choreographers. Concerning the anguished question of contracts, he opined that directors should be nominated for three-year terms by "a Supreme Soviet" of "high-profile people in Russian cultural life," and he suggested the conductor Mstislav Rostropovich to head such a body.

And Plisetskaya? I asked him. "Maya Plisetskaya has changed the face of classical ballet," he answered diplomatically. He added, "She is the most talented ballerina I ever knew"—a statement that his wife undoubtedly will not appreciate. Did he and Ekaterina Sergeyevna ever see Plisetskaya? He shrugged, suggesting an ocean of complications. He and his wife were not artistically inseparable, he explained, although others considered them so. Despite their troubles, Vasiliev and Maximova still live together, their privacy fiercely guarded by Maximova's mother.

Finally, I asked Vasiliev about his present relationship with Grigorovich.

"The problem is not between Yuri Grigorovich and me," he replied. "Grigorovich more or less created my career, and all the best work he created was danced by me. It's that there's a generation that was waiting in hope for us to go, and for whom he created nothing. I could say some really harsh words about Yuri Nikolayevich, but I'm convinced that history will judge him good as well as bad. In spite of everything, I was close to this man for many years."

Engulfed by a sudden melancholy, Vasiliev fell silent, and on impulse I asked him if he was happy. "There is no happiness in our past," he said, "and there will be none in our future."

TWO months earlier, I had been sitting in the auditorium of the largest of the Bolshoi's rehearsal studios. On the raked stage, a *répétiteur* was walking a somewhat listless group of corps-de-ballet dancers through Mikhail Lavrovsky's new ballet, "Fantasy on the Theme of Casanova." I had been curious to see the piece: it was a departure for Lavrovsky and represented a wary rapprochement between the former principal dancer and Grigorovich. The rehearsal was slow, however, and I found my eye drawn to a tall, slender dancer working at one side of the studio. She was not a principal, or even a soloist, but her movements held the eye absolutely. There, unmistakably, was the ballerina line—there, in the bone, the foreknowledge of every role she would dance. After the rehearsal, I spoke to her on the stairs. Outside the windows, snow fell on the bronze horses that gallop above the colonnaded front of the theatre.

Her name was Anna Antonicheva, she was Azerbaijani, and it was her fourth year in the company. She was still officially in the corps, but Grigorovich had recently seen her in rehearsal, and she was now preparing principal roles in "The Stone Flower," "Sleeping Beauty," and "La Bayadère." Her ambition, she said, was to dance the Grigorovich repertoire, and I wondered if she would.

In the main canteen, with its marble pillars and silver samovars, I drank tea with Ivan Pokrovsky, an elderly assistant *répétiteur* who had gone round after the rehearsal turning out the studio lights. Pokrovsky's collar was frayed, and he smoked half cigarettes, which he kept in a small tin. He had joined the Bolshoi in 1949, and toured with the company to London in 1956 and to New York in 1959, where he also assisted Diaghilev's former protégé, Léonide Massine. Of Grigorovich he said, "Yuri Nikolayevich was a magnificent choreographer. We were very excited when he arrived. Now he has so many enemies, but they'll miss him when he's gone. There aren't the personalities there were—Volodya [Vasiliev], Maya . . . Now there are always tears." He shook his head, and watched a ziggurat of sugar lumps crumbling in his tea. "People say that the sixties and seventies were a golden age for the Bolshoi, but you should have seen us in the forties and fifties. . . ."

Victoria Roberts

"No, I don't know where your pirate shirt is."

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ONE evening later that week, I was driven in a Bolshoi car from the theatre to Grigorovich's apartment in the city's center. It was snowing heavily, the weight of the snow all but halting the Lada's windshield wipers. We were late. The Grigorovich apartment, reached by an elevator that slowly ascends an unlit stairwell, is almost nineteenth-century in the eclecticism of its furnishing and decoration: there is Empire gilt and ormolu; there are Buddhas, beaded masks, wolfskins, and candelabra. The result—brooding and theatrical—expresses its owner absolutely. Grigorovich was obviously in considerable physical pain from his fall in Tokyo. Beneath a long dressing gown, his ribs were strapped; he moved with care, and as he sat down or stood up a muscle in his jaw worked. His wife, the recently retired Bessmertnova, watched him with concern. The critic Vitaly Vulf was also present.

Grigorovich spoke of Kokonin, whom he described as "a failed clarinettist turned Communist clerk," and of the uncertainty of the future. For the first time, he seemed to be prepared to discuss the possibility—and the possible style—of his departure. "If Rostropovich called me and said, 'Yuri, we don't need you anymore,' then fine. But not him. Not Kokonin."

I asked him if he knew whom I meant by Anna Antonicheva, and Grigorovich looked closely at me. "You saw her dance?" he asked. I said that I had, and he nodded, smiled, and was silent. His silence suggested that Antonicheva represented the future, represented hope, represented all that there remained to play for.

Later, Vitaly Vulf drove me back to my rented apartment, on Kutuzovsky

Prospekt. The snow was still falling, and the city was white, the roads banked with gray. Only then did it occur to me that Grigorovich's silence might also have indicated his private certainty that the game was lost, that after thirty years the futures of such as Anna Antonicheva were no longer his to decide.

Vitaly Vulf, loyal to his friend, was unwilling to countenance this possibility. "Yuri Nikolayevich has made mistakes," he acknowledged as we sat in the car, its heater whirring, outside the apartment building. "But who else is there, finally?" The company no more wanted Vasiliev's pessimism than Plisetskaya's revanchist histrionics, he felt. As I left him, he repeated, "So who else is there?"

Who indeed? History is unlikely to treat the career of Yuri Grigorovich with generosity. The Byzantine intrigues and the long creative silences, it will be written, exemplify a fatal subordination of artistic promise to the exercise of power. And if his best work transcended the system in whose service it was created, that best consists of no more than half a dozen ballets, the system itself is dead, and the ballets have long been dulled by time and repetition.

That said, Vulf is right. There is no one else—no Russian ballet-maker who approaches Grigorovich in imaginative scale. Commercially, he is the only Russian choreographer capable of creating competitive work, for it is unlikely that there is a world audience for the earnest neoclassicisms of Vasiliev and Lavrovsky, or a demand for the revival of Plisetskaya's choreographic solipsisms. In December, shortly after my conversation with Vulf, Grigorovich's remounting of "Don Quixote" underwent its Moscow première, and although certain critics compared the director and his continuing aspirations to those of Cervantes' hero, reviews were generally polite. For the next three months, Grigorovich simply remained. He had furnished the Ministry of Culture with his resignation, and it lay unimplemented in a Kremlin desk drawer. He had made his representations to the President's office, demanding that Kokonin be removed, and he sat it out.

When the end came, it came fast. Yeltsin's office confirmed Vladimir Kokonin as the Bolshoi Theatre's executive director-general, and, in response, Grigorovich announced that he was stepping down. The President's office then announced, to general consternation, that the over-all artistic direction of the Bolshoi Theatre had been offered to, and accepted by, Vladimir Vasiliev.

IN October, I went to a performance of Vasiliev's "Don Quixote" at the Kremlin Palace. The evening was pleasant enough—the ballerina had been prettily prepared by Maximova—but the production was of a dogged conservatism that, in retrospect, is not promising. Vasiliev is fourteen years younger than Grigorovich, but definitely one of the Old Guard. And the absence of a youthful candidate for the directorship is glaringly apparent: as sadly for Grigorovich as for the company, he left no heir. Maybe Vasiliev, like the heroes he so ardently portrayed, will see the necessity of sacrifice; only if he abnegates his remaining creative ambitions and encourages those of a succeeding generation will the company survive. But, despite his star quality on stage, Vasiliev is not especially popular offstage; his manner is too opaque and his gaze too inward-seeming. Can such a detached figure, one wonders, initiate the hoped-for renaissance at the Bolshoi? I asked Mikhail Baryshnikov, who is a friend of both Grigorovich and Vasiliev, what he made of the situation at the company. He said, "It will take a few years to rejuvenate the spirit. It's a problem of spirit: who and what are they dancing for?" He paused and then reflected, "Maybe . . . there might not be an answer."

Twenty-four hours after the announcement of Vasiliev's appointment, I telephoned the dancer Vladimir Moiseyev at his flat in Mayakovsky Square. The line from London was poor, and Moiseyev sounded both distant and distracted. He had just returned from the theatre and the aborted performance of "Romeo and Juliet." In all quarters of the theatre, he said, performers had been grouped in discussion, desperate and fearful for their futures. Vasiliev, it was rumored, was planning wholesale dismissals. "No one has seen Grigorovich," Moiseyev told me. "No one has spoken to him. He has gone." He was silent for a few moments, gathering his thoughts. "What our future is without him," he said eventually, "God knows." ♦

CORE MATERIAL: *Jennifer Dundas, Robert Se*

onard, Victor Garber, Billy Crudup, and Blair Brown contemplate the universe in Tom Stoppard's "Arcadia," opening next week at Lincoln Center.

FICTION

AFTER RAIN

BY WILLIAM TREVOR

IN the dining room of the Pensione Cesarina solitary diners are fitted in around the walls, where space does not permit a table large enough for two. These tables for one are in three of the room's four corners—by the door of the pantry where the jugs of water keep cool, between one family table and another, on either side of the tall casement windows that rattle when they're closed or opened. The dining room is large, its ceiling high, its plain cream-colored walls undecorated. It is noisy when the pensione's guests are there, the tables for two that take up all the central space packed close together, edges touching. The solitary diners are well separated from this mass by the passage left for the waitresses, and have a better view of the dining room's activity and of the food before it's placed in front of them—whether tonight it is *brodo* or pasta, beef or chicken, and what the *dolce* is.

"*Dieci*," Harriet says, giving the number of her room when she is asked. The table she has occupied for the last eleven evenings has been joined to one that is too small for a party of five: she doesn't know where to go. She stands a few more moments by the door, with the serving dishes busily going by her and wine bottles being grabbed from the marble-topped sideboard by the rust-haired waitress, or the one with a wild look, or the one who is plump and pretty. It is the rust-haired waitress who eventually leads Harriet to the table by the door of the pantry where the water jugs keep cool. "*Da bere*?" she asks, and Harriet, still feeling shy, although no one glanced in her direction when she stood alone by the door, orders the wine she has ordered on other nights, Santa Cristina.

Wearing a blue dress unadorned except for the shiny blue buckle of its belt, she has earrings that hardly show and a necklace of opaque white beads that isn't valuable. Angular and thin, her dark hair cut short, her long face strikingly like the sharply chiselled faces of Modigliani, she passed out of her twenties a month ago. She is alone in the Pensione Cesarina because a love affair is over.

A holiday was cancelled, there was an empty fortnight. She wanted to be somewhere else then, not in England with time on her hands. "*Io sola*," she said on the telephone, hoping she had got that right, choosing the Cesarina because she'd known it in childhood, because she thought that being alone would be easier in familiar surroundings.

"*Va bene*?" the rust-haired waitress inquires, proffering the Santa Cristina.

"*Sì, sì.*"

The couples who mostly fill the dining room are German, the guttural sound of their language drifting to Harriet from the tables that are closest to her. Middle-aged, the women more stylishly dressed than the men, they are enjoying the heat of August and the low-season tariff: demi-pensione at a hundred and ten thousand lire. The heat may be too much of a good thing for some, although it's cooler by dinnertime, when the windows of the dining room are all open, and the Cesarina is cooler anyway, being in the hills. "If there's a breeze about," Harriet's mother used to say, "it finds the Cesarina."

Twenty years ago Harriet first came here with her parents, when she was ten and her brother twelve. Before that she had heard about the pensione, how the terra-cotta floors were oiled every morning before the guests were up, and how the clean smell of oil lingered all day, how breakfast was a roll or two, with tea or coffee on the terrace, how dogs sometimes barked at night, from a farm across the hills. There were photographs of the parched garden and of the stately, ochre-washed exterior, and of the pensione's vineyard, steeply sloping down to two enormous wells. And then she saw for herself, summer after summer in the low season: the vast dining room at the bottom of a flight of stone steps from the hall, and the three salons where there is Stock or grappa after dinner, with tiny cups of harsh black coffee. In the one with the bookcases there are Giotto reproductions in a volume on the table lectern, and "My Brother Jonathan" and "Rebecca" among the detective novels by George Goodchild on the shelves. The guests spoke in murmurs when Harriet first knew these rooms, English mostly, for it was mostly English who came then. To this day, the Pensione Cesarina does not accept credit cards, but instead will take a Eurocheque for more than the guaranteed amount.

"*Ecco, signora.*" A waitress with glasses, whom Harriet has seen only once or twice before, places a plate of tagliatelle in front of her.

"*Grazie.*"

"*Prego, signora. Buon appetito.*"

If the love affair hadn't ended—and Harriet has always believed that love affairs are going to last—she would now be on the island of Skíros. If the love affair hadn't ended, she might one day have come to the Cesarina as her parents had before their children were born, and later might have occupied a family table in the dining room. There is an American family tonight, and an Italian one, and other couples besides the Germans. A couple, just arrived, spoke what sounded like Dutch upstairs. Another Harriet knows to be Swiss, another she also guesses to be Dutch. A nervous English pair are too far away to allow eavesdropping.

"*Va bene*?" the rust-haired waitress inquires again, lifting away her empty plate.

"*Molto bene. Grazie.*"

Among the other solitary diners is a gray-haired dumpy woman who has several times spoken to Harriet upstairs, an American. A man is noticeable every evening because of his garish shirts, and there's a man who keeps looking about him in a jerky, nervous way, and a woman—stylish in black—who could be French. The man who looks about—small, with delicate, well-tended good features—often glances in this woman's direction, and sometimes in Har-

FILIP PAGOWSKI

riet's. An elderly man whose white linen suit observes the formalities of the past wears a differently striped silk tie each dinnertime.

On the first night of her stay Harriet had "The Small House at Allington" in her handbag, intending to prop it up in front of her in the dining room, but when the moment came that seemed all wrong. Already, then, she regretted her impulse to come here on her own and wondered why she had. On the journey out the rawness of her pain had in no way softened, if anything had intensified, for the journey on that day should have been different, and not made alone: she had forgotten there would be that.

With the chicken pieces she's offered, there are roast potatoes, tomatoes and zucchini, and salad. Then Harriet chooses cheese: pecorino, a little Gorgonzola. Half of the Santa Cristina is left for tomorrow, her room number scribbled on the label. On the envelope provided for her napkin this is more elegantly inscribed, in a sloping hand: *Camera Dieci.* She folds her napkin and tucks it away, and for a moment as she does so the man she has come here to forget pushes through another crowded room, coming toward her in the King of Poland, her name on his lips. "I love you, Harriet," he whispers beneath the noise around them. Her eyes close when their caress is shared. "My darling Harriet," he says.

Upstairs, in the room where the bookcases are, Harriet wonders if this solitude is how her life will be. Has she returned to this childhood place to seek whatever comfort a happy past can offer? Is that a truer reason than what she told herself at the time? Her thoughts are always a muddle when a love affair ends, the truth befogged; the truth not there at all, it often seems. Love failed her was what she felt when another relationship crumbled into nothing; love has a way of doing that. And since wondering is company for the companionless, she wonders why it should be so. This is the first time that a holiday has been cancelled, that she has come away alone.

"*Mi dispiace*," a boy in a white jacket apologizes, having spilled some of a liqueur on a German woman's arm. The woman laughs and says in English that it doesn't matter. "*Non importa*," her husband adds when the boy looks vacant, and the German woman laughs again.

"*Mais oui*, I study the law," a long-legged girl is saying. "And Eloise is a stylist."

These girls are Belgian: the questions of two Englishmen are answered. The Englishmen are young, both of them heavily built, casually turned out, one of them mustached.

"Is 'stylist' right? Is that what you say?"

"Oh, yes." And both young men nod. When one suggests a liqueur on the terrace Eloise and her friend ask for cherry brandy. The boy in the white jacket goes to a cupboard off the hall to pour it, where the espresso machine is.

"And you?" Eloise inquires as the four pass through the room, through the French windows to the terrace.

"Nev's in business. I go down after wrecks." The voice that drifts back is slack, accented, confident. English or German or Dutch, these are the people who have made the Pensione Cesarina move with the times, different from the people of Harriet's childhood.

A bearded man is surreptitiously sketching a couple on one of the sofas. The couple, both reading, are unaware. In the hall the American family is much in evidence, the mother with a baby in her arms pacing up and down, the father quieting two other children, a girl and a boy.

"Good evening," someone interrupts Harriet's observations, and the man in the linen suit asks if the chair next to hers is taken by anyone else. His tie tonight is brown and green, and Harriet notices that his craggy features are freckled with an old man's blotches, that his hair is so scanty that whether it's gray or white doesn't register. What is subtle in his face is the washed-out blue of his eyes.

"You travel alone, too," he remarks, openly seeking the companionship of the moment, when Harriet has indicated that the chair beside her is not taken.

"Yes, I do."

"I can always pick out the English."

He offers the theory that this is perhaps something the traveller acquires with age and with the experience of many journeys. "You'll probably see," he adds.

The companion of the bearded man who is sketching the couple on the sofa leans forward and smiles over what she sees. In the hall the American father has persuaded his older children to go to bed. The mother still soothes her baby, still pacing up and down. The small man who so agitatedly glanced about the dining room passes rapidly through the hall, carrying two cups of coffee.

"They certainly feed you," Harriet's companion remarks, "these days at the Cesarina."

"Yes."

"Quite scanty, the food was once."

"Yes, I remember."

"I mean, a longish time ago."

"The first summer I came here I was ten."

He calculates, glancing at her face to guess her age. Before his own first time, he says, which was the spring of 1987. He has been coming since, he says, and asks if she has.

"My parents separated."

"I'm sorry."

"They'd been coming here all their married lives. They were fond of this place."

"Some people fall for it. Others not at all."

"My brother found it boring."

"A child might easily."

"I never did."

"Interesting, those two chaps picking up the girls. I wonder if they'll ever cope with coach tours at the Cesarina."

He talks. Harriet doesn't listen. This love affair had once, like the other affairs before it, felt like the exorcism of the disappointment that so drearily colored her life when her parents went their separate ways. There were no quarrels when her parents separated, no bitterness, no drama. They told their children gently, neither blamed the other. Both—for years, apparently—had been involved with other people. Both said the separation was a happier outcome than staying together for the sake of the family would be. They used those words, and Harriet has never forgotten them. Her brother shrugged the disappointment off, but for Harriet it did not begin to go away until the first of her love affairs. And always, when a love affair ended, there had been no exorcism after all.

"I'm off tomorrow," the old man says.

She nods. In the hall the baby in the American mother's arms is sleeping at last. The mother smiles at someone Harriet can't see and then moves toward the wide stone staircase. The couple on the sofa, still unaware that they've been sketched, stand up and go away. The agitated little man bustles through the hall again.

"Sorry to go." Harriet's companion finishes something he has been saying,

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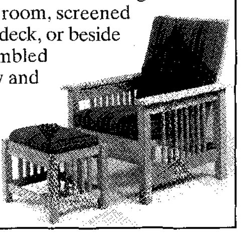

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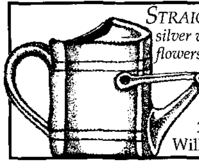

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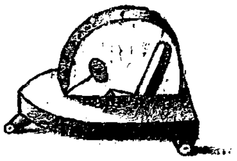
then tells her about his journey: by train because he doesn't care for flying. Lunch in Milan, dinner in Zurich, on neither occasion leaving the railway station. The eleven-o'clock sleeper from Zurich.

"We used to drive out when I came with my parents."

"I haven't ever done that. And of course won't ever now."

"I liked it."

At the time, it didn't seem unreal or artificial. Their smiling faces didn't, nor the pleasure they seemed to take in poky French hotels where only the food was good, nor their chattering to one another in the front of the car, their badinage and arguments. Yet retrospect insisted that reality was elsewhere; that reality was surreptitious lunches with two other people, and afternoon rooms, and guile; that reality was a web of lies until one of them found out, it didn't matter which; that reality was when there had to be something better than what the family offered.



"So this time you have come alone?"

He may have said it twice, she isn't sure. Something about his expression suggests he has.

"Yes."

He speaks of solitude. It offers a quality that is hard to define; much more than the cliché of getting to know yourself. He himself has been on his own for many years and has discovered consolation in that very circumstance, which is an irony of a kind, he supposes.

"I was to go somewhere else." She doesn't know why she makes this revelation. Politeness, perhaps. On other evenings, after dinner, she has seen this man in conversation with whomever he has chosen to sit beside. He is polite himself. He sounds more interested than inquisitive.

"You changed your mind?"

"A friendship fell apart."

"Ah."

"I should be on an island in the sun."

"And where is that, if I may ask?"

"Skíros, it's called. Renowned for its therapies."

"Therapies?"

"They're a fashion."

"For the ill, is this? If I may say so, you don't look ill."

"No, I'm not ill." Unable to keep the men she loves in love with her. But of course not ill.

"In fact, you look supremely healthy."

He smiles. His teeth are still his own. "If I may say so."

"I'm not so sure that I like islands in the sun. But even so, I wanted to go there."

"For the therapies?"

"No, I would have avoided that. Sand therapy, water therapy, sex therapy, image therapy, holistic counselling. I would have steered clear, I think."

"Being on your own's a therapy, too, of course. Although it's nice to have a chat."

She doesn't listen; he goes on talking. On the island of Skíros tourists beat drums at sunset and welcome the dawn with song. Or they may simply swim and play, or discover the undiscovered self. The Pensione Cesarina—even the pensione transformed by the Germans and the Dutch—offers nothing like it. Nor would it offer enough to her parents anymore. Her divided parents travel grandly now.

"I see 'The Spanish Farm' is still on the shelves." The old man has risen and hovers for a moment. "I doubt that anyone's read it since I did in 1987."

"No, probably not."

He says good night and changes it to goodbye because he has to make an early start. For a moment, it seems to Harriet, he hesitates, something about his stance suggesting that he'd like to be invited to stay, to be offered a cup of coffee or a drink. Then he goes, without saying anything else. Lonely in old age, she suddenly realizes, wondering why she didn't notice that when he was talking to her. Lonely in spite of all he claims for solitude.

"Goodbye," she calls after him, but he doesn't hear. They were to come back here the summer of the separation; instead, there were cancellations then, too, and an empty fortnight.

"*Buona notte.*" The boy in the white jacket smiles tentatively from his cupboard as she passes through the hall. He's new tonight; it was another boy before. She hasn't realized that either.

SHE walks through the heat of the morning on the narrow road to the town, by the graveyard and the abandoned petrol pumps. A few cars pass her, coming from the pensione, for the road leads hardly anywhere else, petering out eventually. It would have been hotter on the island of Skíros.

Clouds have gathered in one part of the sky, behind her as she walks. The shade of clouds might make it cooler, she tells herself, but so far they are not close enough to the sun for that. The road widens and gradually the incline becomes less steep as she approaches the town. There's a park with concrete seats and the first of the churches, dedicated to Santa Agnese, of this town.

There's no one in the park until Harriet sits there beneath the chestnut trees in a corner. Far below her, as the town tails off again, a main road begins to wind through clumps of needle pines and umbrella pines to join, far out of sight, a motorway. "But weren't we happy?" she hears herself exclaim, a little shrill because she couldn't help it. Yes, they were happy, he agreed at once, anxious to make that clear. Not happy enough was what he meant, and you could tell; something not quite right. She asked him and he didn't know, genuine in his bewilderment.

When she feels cooler she walks on, down shaded, narrow streets to the central piazza of the town, where she rests again, with a cappuccino at a pavement table.

Italians and tourists move slowly in the unevenly paved square, women with shopping bags and dogs, men leaving the barber's, the tourists in their summery clothes. The church of Santa Fabiola dominates the square, gray steps in front, a brick-and-stone façade. There is another café, across from the one Harriet has chosen, and a line of market stalls beside it. The town's banks are in the square but not its shops. There's a trattoria and a gelateria, their similar decoration connecting them, side by side. "Yes, they're all one," her father said.

In this square her father lifted her high above his head and she looked down and saw his laughing, upturned face and she laughed, too, because he joked so. Her mother stuttered out her schoolgirl French in the little hotels where they stayed on the journey out, and blushed with shame when no one understood. "Oh, this is pleasant!" her mother murmured, a table away from where Harriet is now.

A priest comes down the steps of the church, looks about him, does not see whom he thought he might. A skinny dog goes limping by. The bell of Santa Fabiola chimes twelve o'clock and when it ceases another bell, farther away, begins. Clouds have covered the sun, but

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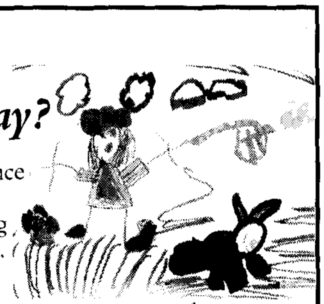

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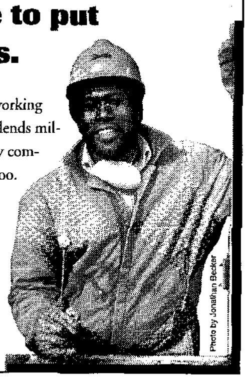

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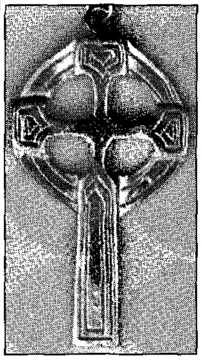

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the air is as hot as ever. There's still no breeze.

It was in the foyer of the Rembrandt Cinema that he said he didn't think their love affair was working. It was then that she exclaimed, "But weren't we happy?" They didn't quarrel. Not even afterward, when she asked him why he had told her in a cinema foyer. He didn't know, he said; it just seemed right in that moment, some fragment of a mood they shared. If it hadn't been for their holiday's being quite soon, their relationship might have dragged on for a while. Much better that it shouldn't, he said.

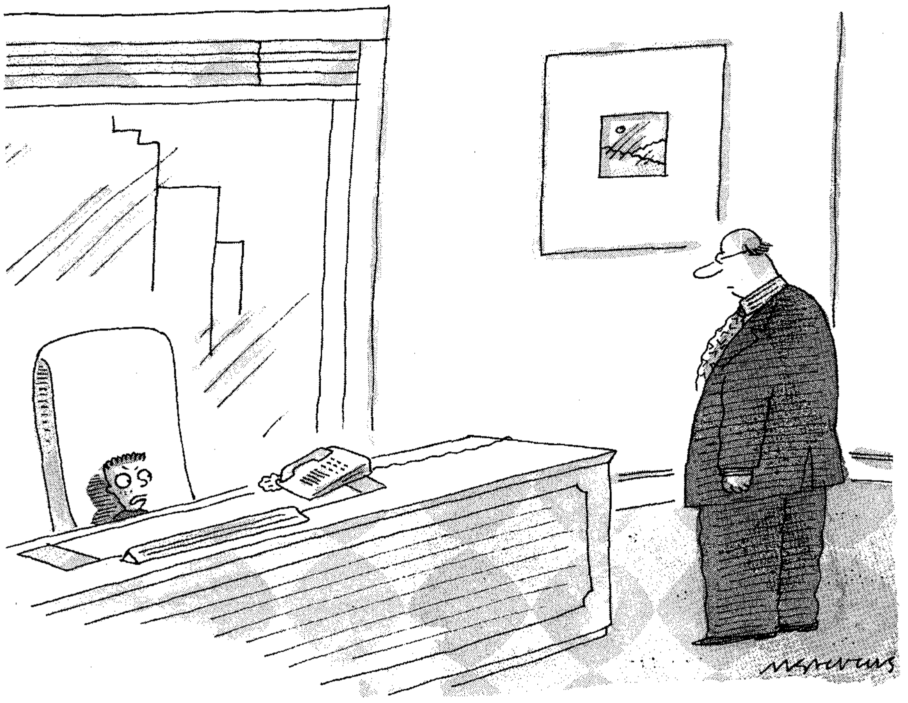
"The fourteenth of February in London was quite as black, and cold, and as wintersome as it was at Allington, and was, perhaps, somewhat more melancholy in its coldness." She has read that bit before and couldn't settle to it, and cannot now. She takes her dark glasses off: the clouds are not the pretty bundles she noticed before, white cotton wool as decoration is by Raphael or Perugino. The clouds that have come up so quickly are gray as lead, a sombre panoply pegged out against a blue that's almost lost. The first drops fall when Harriet tries the doors of Santa Fabiola and finds them locked. They will remain so, a notice tersely states, until half past two.

"It had been finally arranged that the marriage should take place in London," she reads in the trattoria. "There were certainly many reasons which would have made a marriage from Courcy Castle more convenient. The De Courcy family were all assembled at their country family residence, and could therefore have been present at the ceremony without cost or trouble." She isn't hungry; she has ordered risotto, hoping it will be small, and mineral water without gas.

"*C'è del pane o della farina nel piatto? Non devo mangiare della farina,*" a woman is saying, and the gaunt-faced waiter carefully listens, not understanding at first and then excitedly nodding. "*Non c'è farina,*" he replies, pointing at items on the menu. The woman is from the pensione. She's with a lanky young man who might be her son, and Harriet can't identify the language they speak to each other.

"Is fine?" the same waiter asks Harriet as he passes, noticing that she has begun to eat her risotto. She nods and smiles and reads again. The rain outside is heavy now.

THE Annunciation in the church of Santa Fabiola is by an unknown artist, perhaps of the school of Filippo Lippi, no one is certain. The angel kneels, gray wings protruding, his lily half hidden by a pillar. The floor is marble, white and green and ochre. The Virgin



"Are you talking down to me, Evans? Because I don't like it when people talk down to me."

looks alarmed, right hand arresting her visitor's advance. Beyond—background to the encounter—there are gracious arches, a balustrade and then the sky and hills. There is a soundlessness about the picture, the silence of a mystery: no words are spoken in this captured moment, what's said between the two has been said already.

Harriet's eye records the details: the green folds of the angel's dress, the red beneath it, the mark in the sky that is a dove, the Virgin's book, the stately pillars and the empty vase, the Virgin's slipper, the bare feet of the angel. The distant landscape is soft, as if no heat had ever touched it. It isn't alarm in the Virgin's eyes, it's wonderment. In another moment there'll be serenity. A few tourists glide about the church, whispering now and again. A man in a black overall is mopping the floor of the central aisle and has roped it off at either end. An elderly woman prays before a statue of the Virgin, each bead of her rosary fingered, lips silently murmuring. Incense is cloying on the air.

Harriet walks slowly past flaring candles and the tomb of a local family, past the relics of the altar, and the story of Santa Fabiola, which is flaking in a side chapel. She has not been in this church before, neither during her present visit nor in the past. Her parents didn't bother much with churches; she might have come here on her own yesterday or on any day of her stay but she didn't bother either. Her parents liked the sun in the garden of the pensione, the walk down to the cafés, and drives into the hills or to other little towns, to the swimming pool at Ponte Nicolo.

The woman who has been praying hobbles to light another candle, then prays again, and hobbles off. Returning to the Annunciation, Harriet sits down in the pew that's nearest it. There is blue as well as gray in the wings of the angel, little flecks of blue you don't notice when you look at first. The Virgin's slipper is a shade of brown, the empty vase is bulb-shaped with a slender stem, the Virgin's book had gold on it but only traces remain.

The rain has stopped when Harriet leaves the church, the air is fresher. Too slick and glib, to use her love affairs to restore her faith in love: that thought is there mysteriously. She has cheated in her love affairs: that comes from nowhere, too.

Harriet stands a moment longer, alone on the steps of the church, bewildered by this personal revelation, aware instinctively of its truth. The dust of the piazza paving has been washed into the crevices that separate the stones. At the café where she had her cappuccino the waiter is wiping dry the plastic of the chairs.

The sun is still reluctant in the watery sky. On her walk back to the Pensione Cesarina it seems to Harriet that in this respite from the brash smother of heat a different life has crept out of the foliage and stone. A coolness emanates from the road she walks on. Unseen, among the wild geraniums, one bird sings.

Tomorrow, when the sun is again in charge at its time of year, a few midday minutes will wipe away what lingers of this softness. New dust will settle, marble will be warm to touch. It may be weeks, months perhaps, before rain coaxes out these fragrances that are tender now.

The sun is always pitiless when it returns, harsh in its punishment. In the dried-out garden of the Pensione Cesarina they made her wear a hat she didn't like but they could take the sun themselves, both of them skulking behind dark glasses and high-factor cream. Skíros's sun is its attraction. "What I need is sun," he said, and Harriet wonders if he went there after all, if he's there today, not left behind in London, if he even found someone to go with. She sees him in Skíros, windsurfing in Atsitsa Bay, which he has talked about. She sees him with a companion who is uncomplicated and happy in Atsitsa Bay, who tries out a therapy just to see what it's like.

The deck chairs are sodden at the Pensione Cesarina, rose petals glisten. A glass left on a terrace table has gathered an inch of water. The umbrellas in the outer hall have all been used. Windows, closed for a while, are opened; on the vineyard slopes the sprinklers are turned on again.

Not wanting to be inside, Harriet walks in the garden and among the vines, her shoes drenched. From the town comes the chiming of bells: six o'clock

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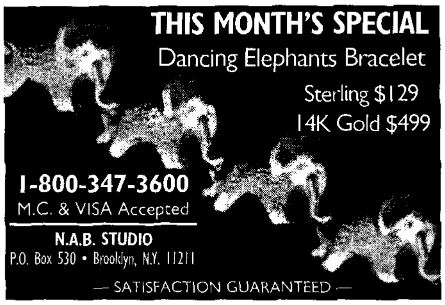

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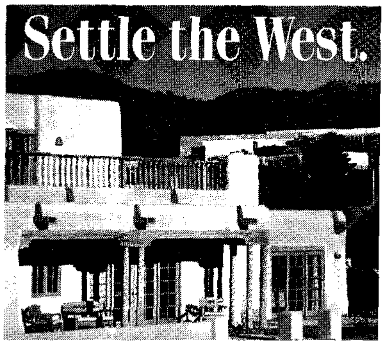

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at Santa Fabiola, six o'clock a minute later somewhere else. While she stands alone among the dripping vines she cannot make a connection that she knows is there. There is a blankness in her thoughts, a density that feels like muddle, until she realizes: the Annunciation was painted after rain. Its distant landscape, glimpsed through arches, has the temporary look that she is seeing now. It was after rain that the angel came: those first cool moments were a chosen time.

IN the dining room, the table where the man with the garish shirts sat has been joined to a family table to allow for a party of seven. There is a different woman where the smart Frenchwoman sat, and no one at the table of the old man. The woman who was explaining in the trattoria that she must not eat food containing flour is given consommé instead of ravioli. New faces are dotted everywhere.

"*Buona sera,*" the rust-haired waitress greets Harriet, and the waitress with glasses brings her salad.

"*Grazie,*" Harriet murmurs.

"*Prego, signora.*"

She pours her wine, breaks off a crust of bread. It's noisy in the dining room now, dishes clattering, the babble of voices. It felt like noise in the foyer of the Rembrandt Cinema when he told her: the uproar of shock, although in fact it was quite silent there. Bright, harsh colors flashed through her consciousness, as if some rush of blood exploded in a kaleidoscope of distress. For a moment in the foyer of the cinema she closed her eyes, as she had when they told her they weren't to be a family anymore.

She might have sent them postcards, but she hasn't. She might have reported that breakfast at the pensione is more than coffee and rolls since the Germans and the Dutch and the Swiss have begun to come: cheese and cold meats, fruit and cereals, fresh sponge cake, a buffet on the terrace. Each morning she has sat there reading "The Small House at Allington," wondering if they would like to know of the breakfast-time improvement. She wondered today if it would interest them to learn that the abandoned petrol pumps are still there on the road to the town, or that she sat in the deserted park beneath the chestnut trees. She thought of sending him a postcard, too, but in the end she didn't. His predecessor it was who encouraged her to bring long novels on holiday: "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall," "The Mill on the Floss."

It's beef tonight, with spinach. And afterward Harriet has *dolce*, remembering this sodden yellow raisin cake from the past. She won't taste that again; as mysteriously as she knows she has cheated without meaning to in her love affairs, she knows she won't come back, alone or with someone else. Coming back has been done, a private journey that chance suggested. Tomorrow she'll be gone.

In the room with the bookcases and the Giotto reproductions she watches while people drink their grappa or their Stock, or ask the white-jacketed boy for more coffee, or pick up conversations with one another. The Belgian girls have got to know the young Englishman who goes down after wrecks and Nev who's in the business world. All four pass through the room on their way to the terrace, the girls with white cardigans draped on their shoulders because it isn't as warm as it was last night. "That man drew us!" a voice cries, and the couple who were sketched last night gaze down at their hardly recognizable selves in the pensione's comment book.

He backed away, as others had, when she asked too much of love, when she tried to change the circumstances that are the past by imposing a brighter present, and constancy in the future above all else. She has been the victim of herself: with vivid clarity she knows that now and wonders why she does and why she didn't before. Nothing tells her when she ponders the solitude of her stay in the Pensione Cesarina, and she senses that nothing ever will. She sees again the brown-and-green-striped tie of the old man who talked about being on your own, and the freckles that are blotches on his forehead. She sees herself walking in the morning heat past the graveyard and the rusted petrol pumps. She sees herself seeking the shade of the chestnut trees in the park, and crossing the piazza to the trattoria when the first raindrops fell. She hears the swish of the cleaner's mop in the church of Santa Fabiola, she hears the tourists' whisper. The fingers of the praying woman flutter on her beads, the candles flare. The story of Santa Fabiola is lost in the shadows that were once the people of her life, the family tomb reeks odorlessly of death. Rain has sweetened the breathless air, the angel comes mysteriously also. ◆

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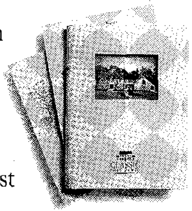

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BOOKS

DOWN THE ROAD

Jack Kerouac's highs and lows, reconsidered in two collections.

BY JOYCE CAROL OATES

THOSE whom the gods wish to destroy, they first make famous. Much as the young, brash, prodigiously gifted George Gordon, Lord Byron, woke one morning in London, in March, 1812, to find himself famous and the trajectory of his brilliant and fated life set before him, so, too, did the brash, prodigiously gifted, not so young (thirty-five-year-old) Jack Kerouac wake one morning in New York, in September, 1957, to find himself a literary celebrity and the course of his less brilliant but equally fated life set before him. From such rocket launchings there can be no return to safe obscurity.

The occasion of Byron's meteoric ascent was the publication of "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage," Cantos I and II; the occasion of Kerouac's was the publication of his second novel, "On the Road," which was blessed with the unlikely imprimatur of the *Times* in the kind of fluke review that can determine not just an artist's career but his or her subsequent life. Dismissed by other reviewers as subliterary trash, "On the Road" was declared by the *Times'* reviewer not just "an authentic work of art" but "a historic occasion" and yet more: "The most beautifully executed, the clearest and the most important utterance yet made by the generation Kerouac himself named years ago as 'beat.' " Wild! Zen lunacy! Few except literary insiders could appreciate the delicious irony of this review, itself something of a historic occasion: it was written by a young man named Gilbert Millstein, who was filling in for a vacationing Orville Prescott, the famously conservative regular reviewer who would surely have loathed "On the Road" if he'd condescended to read it at all.

Both "Childe Harold" and "On the Road" are, of course, pilgrimages: the former an account, in Spenserian stanzas, of a highly self-absorbed and romantic-minded young man's travels in such exotic places as Portugal, Spain, Albania, and Asia Minor; the latter an account, in rhapsodic, head-on, first-person prose, of a young man's travels across the United States hitchhiking and in the manic company of the charismatic Dean Moriarty (in life, the infamous Neal Cassady). Byron's Childe Harold is a transparency through which the twenty-four-year-old poet speaks his mind and his heart with self-dramatizing bravura; Kerouac's Sal Paradise is a twenty-five-year-old aspiring writer identical in most respects to Kerouac—word-obsessed, yearning, and wild to perform "our one and noble function of the time, move." Both pilgrims are force fields of romance and youthful ardor, emblematic of their very different, yet kindred, eras; Kerouac's Sal Paradise is the more rawly adolescent, if not juvenile, yet is possessed of an irresistible, undauntable, Whitmanesque enthusiasm, which fairly leaps off the page:

The Beat path: Kerouac in Tangier, 1957, and in Allen Ginsberg's New York apartment, 1964.

ALLEN GINSBERG

> What is that feeling when you're driving away from people and they recede on the plain till you see their specks dispersing?—it's the too-huge world vaulting us, and it's good-by. But we lean forward to the next crazy venture beneath the skies.

Jack Kerouac, self-designated "madman bum and angel," resembles Byron's friend and fellow-wanderer Percy Shelley as much as he does Byron, in the way he combines narcissism and idealism, passionately fuelled by religious-mystical yearning: not the sublime Neoplatonism of the young expatriated English Romantic but the American-style, San Francisco-based Buddhism of the fifties and sixties—although Kerouac, a lapsed Roman Catholic of French-Canadian background, would retain theistic-Christian imagery throughout his life. In an alcoholic stupor recorded in his 1962 novel "Big Sur," his alter ego Jack Duluoz hallucinates a cross.

Of course, there are differences between Byron and the merely Byronic novelist. Byron, like Shelley, would develop brilliantly as a poet, following his precocious début; Kerouac's prose seems to have scarcely developed at all. The peak of lyricism he reached in "On the Road" would be regained only sporadically throughout the rest of his career. But all of them shared a Rimbaudian belief in deranging their senses in the service of their art. Byron and Shelley were geniuses of the English language, but hardly geniuses of living. Byron died, utterly worn out, at thirty-six; Shelley, in a sailing accident so reckless as to seem near-suicidal, at twenty-nine. Jack Kerouac, if no genius, was one of those prodigies (not unlike Jack London) whose talents come to seem very much a matter of imaginative vigor, physical recklessness, the energies of youth, and adolescent disdain for self-censure and the wise, boring constraints of their elders. (Such iconic masculine figures exert an irresistible appeal. As the flamboyant filmmaker Ken Russell took on, with controversial results, Byron and Shelley, so now Francis Ford Coppola will take on Kerouac and Cassady in a film version of "On the Road." When Coppola recently called an open audition in New York, more than three thousand hopefuls turned up.)

In a flood of prose—millions of hyperthermic words!—Kerouac would squander his writerly gifts as he would, in sexual liaisons as fleeting as those of fruit flies, squander his seed. He believed in neither revision nor remorse. From the evidence of his "true-life novels" and his letters, it seems that Kerouac could not have written with such a zestful lack of inhibition if not for regular jolts of alcohol and drugs. In the 1968 novel "Vanity of Duluoz" the narrator speaks ruefully of "the drugs, the morphine, the marijuana, the horrible Benzedrine we used to take . . . by breaking open Benzedrine inhalers and removing the soaked paper and rolling it into poisonous little balls that made you sweat and suffer. . . . My hair had begun to recede from the sides. I wandered in Benzedrine depression hallucinations." As early as the mid-nineteen-forties, Kerouac was hospitalized for thrombophlebitis from Benzedrine abuse.

Whatever the costs of its composition, "On the Road" came to be enshrined in Beat legend as an ecstatic experience, the first triumph of what Kerouac called "spontaneous prose," the "new literature" that would render all old literature obsolete. Written on one continuous paragraph on a hundred-and fifty-foot roll of teletype paper that ran through Kerouac's typewriter, it was completed in a manic energy surge of twenty days. This famous bout of composition was quickly bested by the dervish-author, who went on to write "The Subterraneans" in three uninterrupted days, and the stage adaptation of "On the Road" in a single night. (Just think if Kerouac had had a word processor.) Kerouac's football-player stamina—he attended Columbia on a sports scholarship—kept him going, but in later years he would lose as many as ten pounds in a single writing session and emerge depleted, depressed, even suicidal. Violent mood swings increasingly characterized his life and his art as he grew, rapidly, older.

TWO valuable new collections, "The Portable Jack Kerouac" (Viking; $27.95) and "Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters 1940-1956" (Viking; $29.95), both edited by Ann Charters, suggest that our response to Kerouac's writing is largely our response to Kerouac's emotions—and to the characters, the "dharma bums" and others, who aroused his emotions to fever pitch. The great (although, it appears, sexually unconsummated) love of Kerouac's life was the handsome son of a Denver skid-row derelict, Neal Cassady. By the time Cassady was twenty-one, according to Dennis McNally's 1979 biography of Kerouac, "Desolate Angel," he had stolen five hundred cars and spent fifteen months in jail. He was an aspiring writer, like Kerouac, yet was even more expansive in his grandiloquence. He was a manic womanizer, a tireless carouser. And what physical prowess! He could run a hundred yards in less than ten seconds and masturbate five or six times a day, every day. Cassady met Kerouac in 1947 and took him on the road in 1949, in a brand-new Hudson, driving from New York City to New Orleans and from there to San Francisco. His fictional alter ego, Dean Moriarty, is a wild man you would not wish to encounter rushing toward you on a two-lane country highway. Sometimes Moriarty drives naked, insisting that his passengers disrobe, too. He seems always to be drunk

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or stoned, or both; isn't above casual theft (from poor folk); and is given to yelling, "Oh man, what kicks!" As Sal Paradise explains it:

> They danced down the streets like dingledodies, and I shambled after as I've been doing all my life after people who interest me, because the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live . . . the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue centerlight pop and everybody goes "Awww!"

Virtually all of Kerouac's novels after "On the Road," notably "The Subterraneans" (1958), "The Dharma Bums" (1958), "Visions of Cody" (1959), "Doctor Sax" (1959), "Big Sur" (1962), "Desolation Angels" (1965), and "Vanity of Duluoz" (1968), are, like the metafictional experiments of the sixties and seventies, as much about the process of creation as about their ostensible subjects. In each novel, a Kerouac alter ego travels with delirious Beat friends and gorgeous women through a vertiginous rush of vivid settings, from Seattle to Tangier, recalling events in the "sheer joy of confession," as Kerouac named it in his essay "The Origins of Joy in Poetry."

Most of the excerpts from novels and prose pieces in "The Portable Jack Kerouac" contain inspired passages—lyric language emulating jazz riffs—set beside passages that are not so inspired. Kerouac is capable of scintillating speech and also of speech as undifferentiated as the sound of a gravel truck unloading. This is the inevitable result of the author's "kind of new-old Zen Lunacy poetry, writing whatever comes into your head as it comes." (The story "Good Blonde," originally published in *Playboy*, and the essay "On the Road to Florida," about a trip taken in the company of his photographer-friend Robert Frank, are exceptions to Kerouac's usual unstoppered flow, being conventionally structured, and they are, in fact, extremely readable.) But to say that Kerouac's work is uneven is simply to say that it is Kerouac's work.

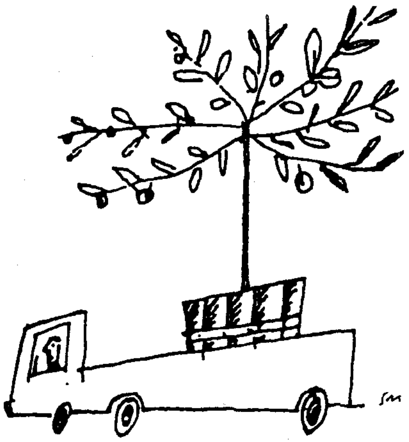
In "The Dharma Bums," there is a wonderfully narrated mountain-climbing episode with the California poet Japhy Ryder (a.k.a. Gary Snyder), and a funny pricking of Beat-Buddhist pretensions:

> I went over to an old cook [in San Francisco's Chinatown] and asked him, "Why did Bodhidharma come from the West?" . . . "I don't care," said the old cook, with lidded eyes, and I told Japhy and he said, "Perfect answer, absolutely perfect. Now you know what I mean by Zen."

Kerouac is capable of humor both lunatic and ironic, "goofy" (a favorite Beat word) and chilling. In his story "The Mexican Girl" his boy romantic's eye is as shrewd as Nathanael West's:

> Sunset and Vine!—what a corner! Now there's a corner! Great families off jalopies from the hinterlands stood around the sidewalk gaping for sight of some movie star and the movie star never showed up. When a limousine passed they rushed eagerly to the curb and ducked to look: some character in dark glasses sat inside with a bejeweled blond. "Don Ameche! Don Ameche!" "No George Murphy! George Murphy!" They milled around looking at one another. Luscious little girls by the thousands rushed around with drive-in trays; they'd come to Hollywood to be movie stars and instead got all involved in everybody's garbage. . . . Handsome queer boys who had come to Hollywood to be cowboys walked around wetting their eyebrows with hincty fingertip. Those beautiful little gone girls cut by in slacks in a continuous unbelievable stream; you thought you were in heaven but it was only Purgatory and everybody was about to be pardoned, paroled, powdered and put down; the girls came to be starlets; they up-ended in drive-ins with pouts and goosepimples on their bare legs. . . .Hollywood Boulevard was a great screaming frenzy of cars; there were minor accidents at least once a minute; everybody was rushing off toward the farthest palm . . .and beyond that was desert and nothingness.

Set pieces of sustained drama include sharply recalled episodes of boyhood angst in the "gloomy bookmovie" of "Doctor Sax," and of an opium overdose—in the company of the brilliantly sinister junkie Bull Hubbard (a.k.a. William Burroughs)—in "Desolation Angels." In "Big Sur" there is a blackly comic nightmare interlude with a distraught woman named Billie who threatens to kill herself and her young son if the alcohol-dazed Jack Duluoz refuses to love her, and the terrifying lucidity of a true Zen epiphany in a retreat in Raton Canyon, as Duluoz tries to meditate, to regain some measure of his lost, pre-"King of the Beatniks" innocence:



> I remember seeing a mess of leaves suddenly go skittering in the wind and into the creek, then floating rapidly down the creek towards the sea, making me feel a nameless horror even then of "Oh my God, we're all being swept away to sea no matter what we know or say or do"—And a bird who was on a crooked branch is suddenly gone without my even hearing him.

"Big Sur" even features a prescient evocation of an aging literary hero:

> "No!" I almost yell, "I mean I'm so exhausted I don't wanta do anything or see anybody"—(already feeling awful guilt about Henry Miller anyway, we've made an appointment with him about a week ago and instead of showing up . . . at seven we're all drunk at ten calling long distance and poor Henry just said "Well I'm sorry I don't get to meet you Jack but I'm an old man and at ten o'clock it's time for me to go to bed.")

Ann Charters has assembled a highly readable "Portable Jack Kerouac" and an intermittently engaging "Selected Letters." The anthology would have been stronger if she had included the whole of "On the Road" and omitted Kerouac's poems—his "pomes," as he often referred to them. As it is, some of "On the Road" 's strongest passages, among them the wry, memorable ending, are missing. Still, it is an attractive gathering. Charters, who has written a biography of Kerouac, is too loyal to him, or too diplomatic, to acknowledge the obvious: that such a volume allows for judicious editing of the kind that, in life, Kerouac so disdained.

Unfortunately, the "Selected Letters" ends in 1956, shortly before the publication of "On the Road," and if it is of lesser interest this is primarily because Kerouac's life so intimately fed his fiction that to have read the fiction is to already know the life in a more urgent, distilled form. Also, the letters—for all their rhapsodizing on life, writing, and Buddhism—do not demonstrate a striking intelligence, still less a particularly original imagination. Yet they do throw off sparks of raw, coruscating emotion. There are letters to family members, to his first wife, Edith Parker, and to editors and literary acquaintances (among them Alfred Kazin, whom Kerouac seems to have besieged with manuscripts and requests) as well as to the real-life models of his fictional characters. Most of the letters, though, are to that same small gathering of people upon whom Kerouac was emotionally fixed.

The most warmly effusive (and longest) letters are, of course, to Neal Cassady, to whom Kerouac poured out his heart as if writing to a mirror self, rehearsing the nostalgic novels "Doctor Sax," "Visions of Gerard," "Maggie Cassidy." Kerouac even volunteered to type Cassady's voluminous "scrawls," out of a passion for pure writing: "It's the work itself I want, want to see the ordered sentences typed up neat on perfect pages under a soft lamp, wild prose describing the world as it raced through my brain and cock once."

The most interesting letters are those to Allen Ginsberg, whom Kerouac admired as a poet and an intellectual yet could not resist chiding. He could swerve, in the course of a seemingly amicable note, into sudden hostility:

> September 6, 1945
>
> The quality of my friendship for you is far purer than yours could ever be for me. . . . There's nothing that I hate more than the condescension you begin to show whenever I allow my affectionate instincts full play with regard to you; that's why I always react angrily against you. It gives me the feeling that I'm wasting a perfectly good store of friendship on a little self-aggrandizing weasel.

Or into inept superiority:

> July 14, 1955
>
> Don't study Greek and Prosody at Berkeley get away from this Pound kick. Pound is an Ignorant Poet—how many times do I have to tell you that it's a Buddhist, AN EASTERN FUTURE ahead—Greeks and Poem styles are child's play. . . . The Greeks are a bunch of Ignorant Cocksuckers as any fool can plainly see. . . . I like Dickinson and Blake. . . . But even they are Ignorant because they simply don't know that everything is empty IN AND OUT IN TEN THOUSAND INFINITE DIRECTIONS OF THE UNDISTURBED LIGHT . . . please, Allen, wake up . . .
>
> All's I need is a drink. . . . I drink eternally. Drink always and ye shall never die. Keep running after a dog, and he will never bite you; drink always before the thirst, and it will never come upon you.

"Look, Ellen, haven't I always been fairly honest with you?"

• •

FOR an artist whose work is gaining strength and inward authority, failure can be nurturing; success, particularly premature success, can be devastating. Kerouac, long accustomed to the vicissitudes and camaraderie of a marginal literary existence, began to crack up almost immediately after the publication of "On the Road." His canonization as spokesman for a new Beat Generation assured him an ineradicable identity, which would follow him to the grave, and beyond. His drinking escalated. His friendships foundered. His affairs became ever more desperate and short-lived. (Impotence, a result of chronic alcoholism, did not help.) His relationships with editors, always uneasy, seem to have worsened under the strain of his egomania, for of what service was even a brilliant editor like Malcolm Cowley to a compulsive writer who believed that "as it comes, so it flows, and that's literature at its purest"? Celebrated by the media in one season, Kerouac was virulently, viciously, jeeringly, and indefatigably assailed by it in seasons to follow. Yet he had his fans—stoned acolytes of "On the Road"—who followed him everywhere they could, and whom he feared and despised. Our vision of Kerouac, provided by the author himself, is of a man aging before our eyes, as in a horror film. By the time of his notorious *Paris Review* interview, in 1967, an embittered and incoherent Kerouac had revised (that is, repudiated) his personal emotional history:

> Oh the beat generation was just a phrase I used in the 1951 written manuscript of *On the Road* to describe guys like Moriarty who run around the country in cars looking for odd jobs, girlfriends, kicks. It was thereafter picked up by West Coast leftist groups and turned into a meaning like "beat mutiny" and "beat insurrection" and all that nonsense; they just wanted some youth movement to grab onto for their own po-

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> litical and social purposes. I had nothing to do with any of that. I was a football player, a scholarship college student, a merchant seaman.

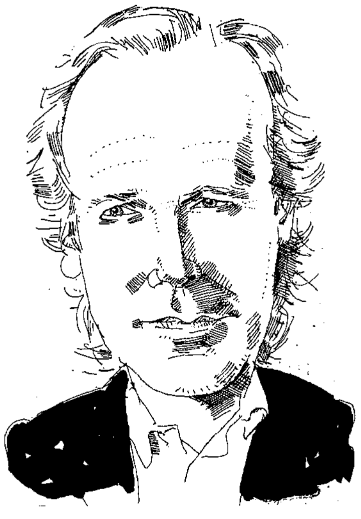
Politically reactionary, anti-intellectual, distrustful of a new "Pepsi generation of twisting illiterates," and even of anti-Vietnam War agitation, Kerouac retreated to cramped quarters in St. Petersburg, Florida, with his mother and his third wife, Stella. His life was a succession of late-night drunken telephone calls, days of television, fits of working on a manuscript tentatively titled "The Beat Spotlight." In February, 1968, he learned that Neal Cassady was dead, at forty-one, of a lethal combination of tequila and Seconal. Kerouac survived him only briefly, dying in October, 1969, at forty-seven. He was drinking, writing in his notebook, eating from a can of tuna fish, and watching "The Galloping Gourmet" when he was stricken.

The evidence of Jack Kerouac's œuvre is that, for all its flaws, it, and he, deserved to be treated better by the censorious "literary" critics of his time. Kerouac was dismissed as a "beatnik" by many commentators who had not troubled to read his work, still less to read it with sympathy. "The Portable Jack Kerouac" may well be seminal in a reëvaluation of Kerouac's position in the literature of mid-twentieth-century America—a richly varied affluence of "high" and "low" art that permanently changed the course of our fiction. The era is distinguished by tales of mordant flight from domesticity, bounded by Paul Bowles' cult novel "The Sheltering Sky" (1949) and John Updike's "Rabbit, Run" (1960). Between them stand such disparate works as J. D. Salinger's "The Catcher in the Rye," Vladimir Nabokov's "Lolita," Allen Ginsberg's "Howl," Norman Mailer's "The White Negro," and William S. Burroughs' "Naked Lunch." "On the Road" is a classic of the era to set beside these. ♦

MANILA PAPER

Clinical romance and Filipino history in "The Blue Afternoon."

BY ZOE HELLER



William Boyd

JOE CIRADELLO

EVERY year, when the recipient of the Booker Prize for fiction is announced in Britain, a group of newspaper columnists and reviewers rises up to pronounce the winning book "unreadable" and the literary taste of the Booker judges "pretentious." Every year, these champions of the good old-fashioned yarn demand to know why William Boyd didn't get the big check and the prestige. Boyd is the hero of British middlebrow literature—the unofficial patron saint of beginnings, middles, and ends. His novels all come eminently equipped with intricate plots, efficiently pursued themes, and dogged evocations of other times and places—McCarthyite Hollywood in "The New Confessions," the American South in "Stars and Bars," Africa in "Brazzaville Beach," "A Good Man in Africa," and "An Ice-Cream War" (Boyd, the son of Scottish expatriates, was born and brought up in Ghana). It is often said that Boyd is "a master storyteller," "a daring craftsman." He knows how to weave a plot, how to build a sense of place. Part of his appeal, one suspects, has to do with the reassuring sense he offers of a writer doing some real *work*.

Boyd's latest novel, "The Blue Afternoon,” starts out in 1936 in Los Angeles, where the narrator, a young architect called Kay Fischer, finds herself trailed by Salvador Carriscant, an enigmatic stranger who claims to be her father. Fischer is persuaded to accompany her putative parent on a journey in search of his long-lost lover. As she unravels Carriscant’s complicated past, we are taken further back in time, to Manila at the beginning of the century, where Carriscant, a successful young surgeon, became involved in a series of murders and a tragic love affair.

Like most of Boyd’s previous novels, “The Blue Afternoon” bears the freight of considerable historical research. The busy story line makes regular stops for mini-digressions on the aesthetics of nineteen-twenties architecture, the standards of hygiene in Filipino operating rooms in the early nineteen-hundreds, the history of Filipino racial politics, and even the origins of modern aviation. (Carriscant’s anesthetist is a fanatical aeronaut in his spare time.) There is much to be admired in Boyd’s fastidious attention to historical accuracy. Yet some of this more evidently researched material has an awkward, extraneous feel to it, as if the author, having spent a lot of time reading up on his subject, were determined to get all his findings into the book.

Like the fiction of Michael Crichton (another writer disinclined to wear his background reading lightly), Boyd’s novels often seem to derive their shape from a shopping list of themes and ideas rather than from any organic development of character. This explains why, in spite of the earnest accumulation of period detail, they tend to have the schematic, yet-to-be-fleshed-out quality of film treatments. (Again like Crichton, Boyd writes screenplays as well as novels; two of his books—“Stars and Bars” and “A Good Man in Africa”—have been made into films.) The burden of meaning in Boyd’s work is carried by the plot: characters are simply the people that plot happens to, and they function less in the classic nineteenth-century, three-dimensional sense than as fairy-tale archetypes. In “The Blue Afternoon” Fischer is a frumpy career girl with a loveless life summed up by her taste in ascetic German architecture, and Carriscant—well, Carriscant is still waters running deep. That’s it.

It’s not that we don’t know what either of these characters is feeling at any given point—we do. They are forever saying things angrily, shyly, knowingly, dully, automatically, wistfully, breezily, delightedly, confidently, impatiently, dreamily, sincerely, gauchely. But, beyond the cunningly economical use of adverbs, Boyd’s interest in his characters seems to peter out. Their dialogue is a drab affair. Once in a while there will be an outburst of rather stilted passion, signalled by romance-novel ellipses and verbless sentences. (“ ‘Maybe we will fly away,’ she said softly, as he softly kissed her throat. ‘One day.’ ”) For the most part, though, they are made to speak in a sort of hypernaturalistic drone, apparently on the theory that *real* people spend the greater portion of their conversational lives making arrangements for the consumption of hot beverages. (“Any chance of that coffee?” “Come on, drink some coffee, you’ll be fine.” “You got half an hour? Can I offer you some tea or coffee?”)

Boyd’s supporters are correct: he *is* a fine craftsman, and “The Blue Afternoon” is too carefully and intelligently made to qualify as a bad book. It remains, nonetheless, an oddly unaffecting book—efficient but deathly cool, all tell and no show. The story ends with Carriscant ferreting out his amour in Lisbon. Thirty years on, she has grown frail and ill, and he has developed a potbelly, yet they kiss with “a real and gentle carnality.” Here is the novel’s big idea—the enduring, transforming power of love. Observing the scene, Fischer is deeply moved. The reader, who would like to be moved, too, looks for something in this encounter between two ciphers to provide the requisite nudge, but must, in the end, take the narrator on trust.

THEREIN LIES A TALE

[*From the Bar Harbor Times*]

CORRECTION

In a news brief in last week’s edition of the *Times*, it was mistakenly reported that Janice Jones-Maxwell was fired from her position as executive director of the Mount Desert Chamber of Commerce after she was charged with embezzling chamber money. In fact, the position of executive director was eliminated due to lack of funds. The *Times* apologizes for the error.

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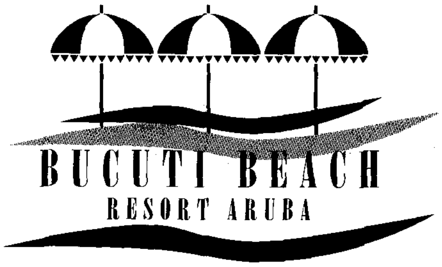
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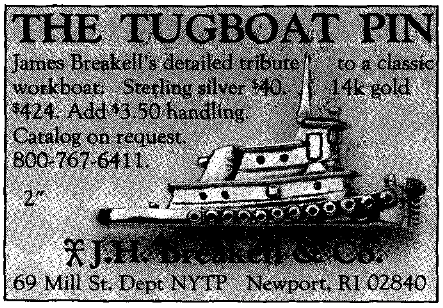
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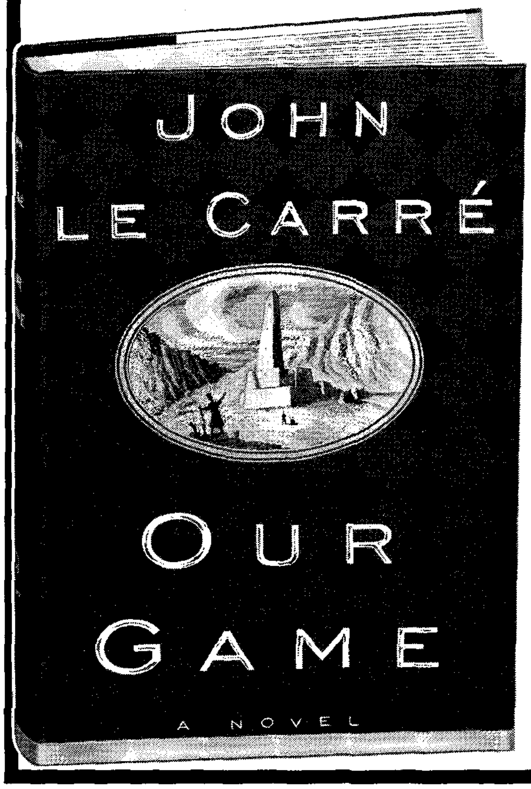

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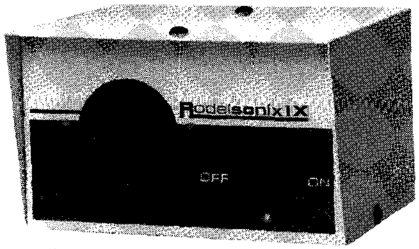

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RECOMMENDED READING

The Winshaw Legacy
by Jonathan Coe (Knopf; $24)

When Michael Owen is commissioned by old Tabitha Winshaw to write a history of her rich and famous family, he has trouble believing her claim that one of its members killed another. But he does find that the younger generation of Winshaws has corrupted government, the media, high finance, art, food, and medicine, for immense personal profits. All these evils have direct consequences for the few people whom the depressed Michael has been able to love—his father and, timidly, two winning women. A spoof of classic mystery stories and silly British comedies, this hefty novel is not only funny, trenchant, and ingenious; it makes you burn with anger and just about lays you flat with sadness.

After the Fact
by Clifford Geertz
(Harvard; $22.95)

"It is difficult to know what to do with the past," Geertz writes, but of his own past he has made an elegant, almost meditative volume of reflections. In prose that is sometimes liquid, sometimes *faux*-Jamesian, Geertz looks back over the sites of his anthropological labors: Sefrou, in Morocco; Pare, in Indonesia; the University of Chicago; the Institute for Advanced Study, at Princeton. "Places are accidents and their names ideas," he remarks, and in this book the reader is allowed to witness how fruitfully accident and idea have mingled in the making of one anthropologist's career.

Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s
by Ann Douglas
(Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $25)

It was in New York in the twenties that America came of age intellectually, Douglas argues in this sparkling book. The nation, newly acknowledged as a world power, simultaneously discovered two legacies of which it had been only dimly aware—a rich literary tradition and a flourishing African-American culture. Americans encountered the works of Melville (whose brief obituary in the *Times*, in 1891, had memorialized "Henry Melville"), and found that behind the mask of minstrelsy lurked ragtime, the blues, and jazz. And it was in Manhattan that many of the principal figures of the decade—Bessie Smith and Bix Beiderbecke, Hemingway and Fitzgerald, Freud and William James, Edna St. Vincent Millay and Langston Hughes—found their voices, or their audiences. The reader pursues Douglas through this explosion of creativity, listening to her expositions of ideas and characters, quarrelling at times with her judgments, but always engaged, always challenged.

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THE ART WORLD

THE NAUMAN PRINCIPLE

A provocateur's body of work at MOMA.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

A BIG travelling retrospective of the art of Bruce Nauman has at last arrived at the Museum of Modern Art, after more than a year of out-of-town tryouts in Madrid, Minneapolis, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C. Nauman, who turns fifty-four this year, is the most influential American artist of his generation, and the enthusiasm that the show has inspired, at least in downtown circles, seems less a critical verdict than the kind of all-purpose glee that welcomed the Wells Fargo wagon rolling into town in "The Music Man." The show displays Nauman on a scale that we've never seen before, and certainly shows off his dazzling talent for avoiding a signature style while conveying, again and again, his signature emotion: nameless dread, expressed with inscrutable equipoise. Still, museumgoers may end up feeling as ambivalent about the show as I do.

Part of my response may just be sour grapes at seeing a cult enthusiasm become an official taste. Back in the late eighties, some of us were already declaring Nauman the artist of the mid-nineties. We found in his austere mobiles of broken wax-cast animal bodies, in his dead-end-corridor installations, and in his large neon pieces—where human imperatives ("Come and Live," "Live and Die") were reduced to cool, blinking mechanical signs—evidence of a satiric sensibility, even of a puritan conscience. That seemed to be the necessary antidote to the slackness and self-indulgence of so much eighties art. There's also no pretending that Nauman, who lives in New Mexico, hasn't benefitted, especially in the past five years, from the Sam Shepard Syndrome—that is, the ability to get all the advantages of an insider while passing (or posing) as an outsider.

Nauman-in-the-wings, however, turns out to have been more attractive than Nauman-in-apotheosis. Although his art at MOMA looks every bit as scary and impressive as one had expected, it is also *relentless.* An exhaustive Nauman show is exhausting. In the most famous of his large-scale projected-video pieces, "Clown Torture," tapes of a clown repeating dumb jokes ("Pete and Repeat were sitting on a fence. Pete fell off; who was left? Repeat," etc.) run on and on and on. The ostensible point of the piece is to demonstrate the numbing of meaning through repetition, but the implicit point is that Nauman has the stature to make you stand there and take it. The last video installation in the show, "Learned Helplessness in Rats" (the title refers to a psychological term for one of the causes of depression), shows a rat being run ragged through a maze to the sound of rock-and-roll drumming; the rat does have a weary, depressed look, like someone who has just been through a big Bruce Nauman exhibition.

This is, of course, not just the point but very much The Point: Nauman thinks that life is like a maze and we are like the rats inside it, and he certainly knows how to make this idea register as art. Whether or not the idea is valid, no one can call its enactment fun, especially for the rat. Nauman takes art about as far from the pleasure principle as it can be taken and still remain art. (If anybody takes it further, I don't want to be invited to the opening.) The Nauman show may produce in some museumgoers a sensation of inscrutable equipoise all its own: standing in the midst of the Nauman exhibition, I, at least, was torn between my desire to stay and praise again and my equally intense desire to go someplace else.

I'm pretty sure, too, that this emotion is built into the art, instead of being a product of the exhibition. In its earlier stops, the Nauman show was said to be a bit of a carnival, with noise from the video monitors intruding on other pieces. Robert Storr, the MOMA curator who installed the show here, has worked against that grain, grasping the essential point that it is "transgressive" anti-art that gains the most from mandarin pacing and formal clarity. (MOMA has always been a good place to demonstrate this: it is Duchamp and Dubuffet, not Matisse and Picasso, who benefit most from the white walls; the walls play straight man to the violations.) Storr's spacious, brooding, intellectual installation is a model of how to show provocative art without betraying its provocations. There's nothing antiseptic about the installation: the scary parts are scary, and the gloomy stuff is gloomy, and the sobriety of the pacing—the simple distance between rooms and elements—even allows an overlooked vein of slow-motion, slapstick humor to register. But the show now feels like a show rather than a sideshow.

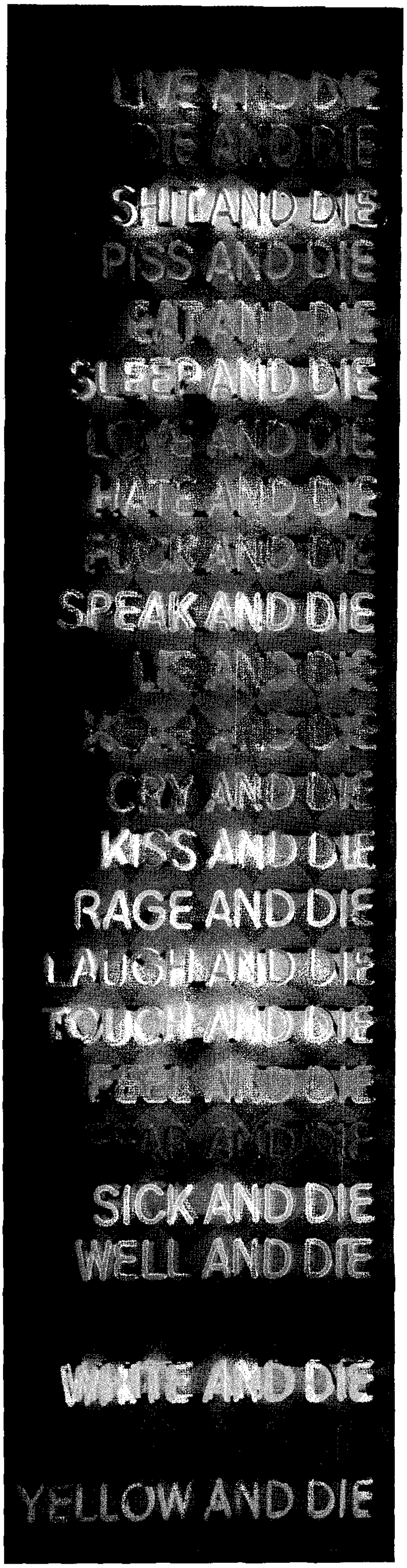
The exhibition also benefits from being on two floors—an arrangement that offers a breathing space between the downstairs account of Nauman's art in the sixties and seventies and the upstairs survey of Nauman's art through the nineties. The downstairs rooms are filled with the pieces that first earned Nauman his reputation as a provocateur. Storr, in the handout that accompanies the show, refers to Nauman as a conceptual artist, which is obviously the case, in the sense that his art depends on ideas rather than materials. But many of the ideas in Nauman's art, like the situations in Beckett's plays, are extremely obvious; what Nauman shares with Beckett is the ability to treat those ideas so simply that they register as primary emotions.

NAUMAN, who was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana, is a California artist. When he began to make art, in 1965, he worked in the same orbit as the sunny California transcendentalists Robert Irwin and James Turrell, and he shares with them a predilection for art as dramatic revelation, as event, as *theatre*. Yet where their little environmental theatres had happy or, at least, beatific endings, Nauman has always been relentlessly pessimistic.

The exhibition reconstructs one of the best of these early "theatre" pieces. In a corridor installation from 1970, you can enter any one of three high and narrow hallways that are scarcely wide enough to allow you to spread your arms. At the far end of one corridor, two television monitors are stacked on top of each other. As you approach, you see that both monitors show the interior of the corridor. But one shows you in the hallway at that moment—a live broadcast of your approach seen from high above and behind. On the other monitor the corridor is empty, as though you had never entered. Here You Are; You Are Not Here. You simultaneously experience the corridor as a trap and witness it, from on high, as a void. Claustrophobia (you are being watched, you are being controlled) is suddenly set off by detachment (this place exists independent of you, your presence in it hardly matters), and this produces an uncanny double effect. Nauman's corridors are nightmare alleys, leading nowhere and offering no way out, and they remain the finest instance in American art of the paranoia of the late sixties, as coldly apocalyptic as "Gimme Shelter" or the good songs of the Doors.

In 1966, Nauman began to work with neon signs. While other American artists were using neon signs as Pop jokes, as part of the found poetry of public meanings, Nauman used them, bizarrely, as reservoirs for the unconscious. Or, more precisely, for the preconscious, since the little slogans and maxims that Nauman sets in neon—"Run from Fear, Fun from Rear," "Violins Violence Silence"—are the empty, abstract concepts, the dumb puns and catchphrases, that fill everybody's head, forlornly waiting to be applied to something real. Nauman's neon signs, with their evocation of big-town loneliness and sci-fi emptiness, cast a spell halfway between Edward Hopper and "The Terminator," and are the finest American art that has to be plugged in.

In his early career, Nauman was one of the prime visual impresarios of American gloom. Upstairs at MOMA, in the part of the show given over mostly to Nauman's big video installations of



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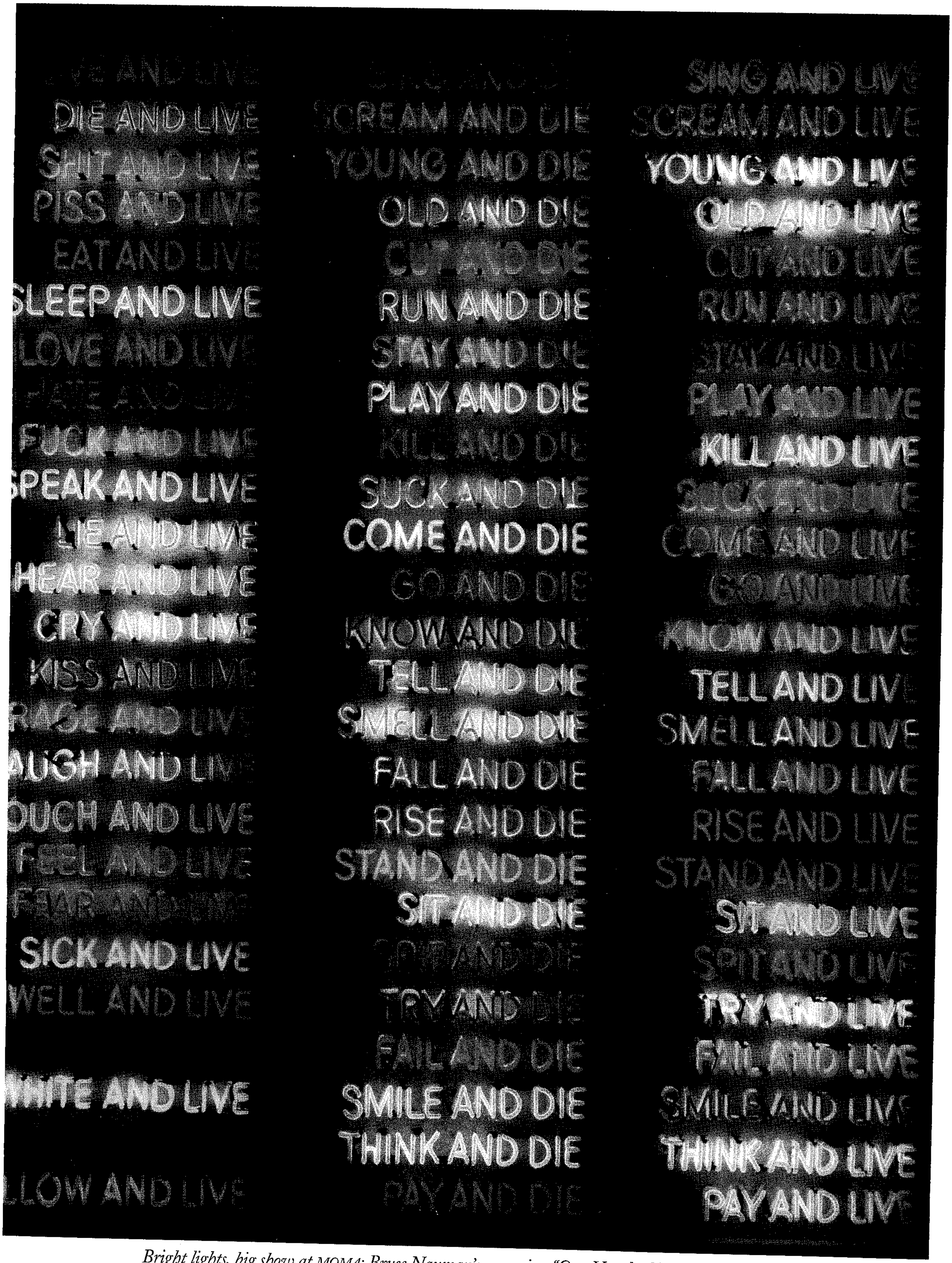
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Bright lights, big show at MOMA: *Bruce Nauman's neon sign "One Hundred Live and Die" (1984).*

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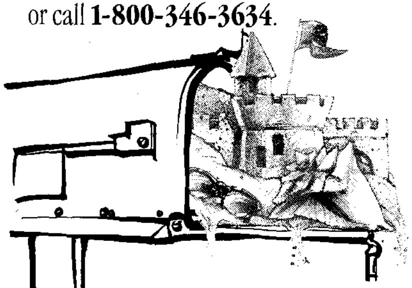

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the last ten years, the visitor's nerves may get a bit rubbed. The video works are still theatre pieces—tape loops projected on a giant scale or running on a bank of monitors. In many of them, an unhappy personage shouts, in a Laurie Anderson-type singsong, a series of deliberately dumbed-down phrases. "Poke in the Eye / Nose / Ear" shows Nauman, in extreme closeup, poking himself with his finger; "Shit in Your Hat—Head on a Chair" shows a mime trying to perform at the command of an off-screen director. (Nauman's sense of humor doesn't always communicate itself to those of his admirers who take everything he does with postgraduate earnestness; anyone who calls an animated neon piece in which two clowns shake hands while flashing their erections "Mean Clown Welcome" knows how to make a joke of his own portentousness.)

The video work is memorable, but a lot of it is also, in plain English, annoying—not shocking or disturbing but just exasperating as hell. Walking through the Nauman show, you may, in fact, have the slightly blasphemous thought that the Annoying has become to our decade what the Boring was to the nineteen-sixties—the O.K. avant-garde emotion. We have a tolerance for a kind of highbrow art—the movies of Peter Greenaway, say, or the novels of Paul Auster—that, though not dull, and sometimes quite profound, is endlessly aggravating. Boring and Annoying are both late-modern categories, in the simple sense that they presume an audience willing to put up with a lot, and also an audience no longer held by shock. Boring presumes a captive audience; Annoying presumes one with a short attention span.

I think it was Philip Larkin who once said that some Greek long ago taught us that things that make us miserable might be good for us. But there is a difference between being made miserable by too much harsh or confusing emotion and being made miserable by loud noises shouted at you by an artist wearing clown makeup. Picasso is noisy, too, but my problem with Nauman's aggression is not its unpleasantness but the studied, calculated way in which it is unpleasant: it does not seem expressive, just sort of mean—less a howl than a whine.

Nauman's art does often *earn* its aggravations through its perfect pitch for the ugly tenor of contemporary American life. What takes the place of a pleasure principle is a reality principle, and Nauman's art is often, in its elliptic, poetic way, upsettingly *right*. Whenever you're feeling impatient with Nauman's relentlessness, you need only walk outside the precincts of the museum to find a world filled with "found" Naumans. Up in the toddler department at F. A. O. Schwarz, for instance, you can buy a pair of talking handcuffs—your kid is meant to clap them on some playmate, and then press a button: "BOOK HIM! BOOK HIM! BOOK HIM!" the handcuffs then cry out, or else, on the next turn, "CUFF HIM! CUFF HIM! CUFF HIM!" Nauman for tykes. For that matter, the notion of watching a video in which the stuff of human tragedy has been reduced to an endlessly repetitive and numbing dumb show can hardly be said to be alien to this moment—the entire O.J. trial, and everything around it, ought to be called "Clown Torture II."

Still, there's a moment when one wonders if Nauman's representations of American life are not just another embodiment of its ugliness. Nauman appeals a little bit too much to the petty commissars of postmodernism—to a certain kind of professional museumgoer who takes pleasure in seeing the pleasure emptied out of art. (Roberta Smith's review of this show in the *Times* is an index of this attitude.) Whatever private imperatives drive Nauman, his body of work is often taken up as a demonstration that art not only doesn't have to be appealing but that anything appealing in it is by definition not art. This seems as unreal as the position that art should be nothing but pleasure (a position that, as it happens, nobody holds right now). It is exactly the theatricality of Nauman's unrelenting gloominess that creates its exhaustions. There is something generalized about his unhappiness which accounts both for its applicability and for a certain academic thinness that creeps into it. Nauman was better in his old role as the conscience of the art world than in his new role as its presiding genius. A puritan conscience is, in America, always a good thing to have; a puritan establishment in power is not nice at all. ♦

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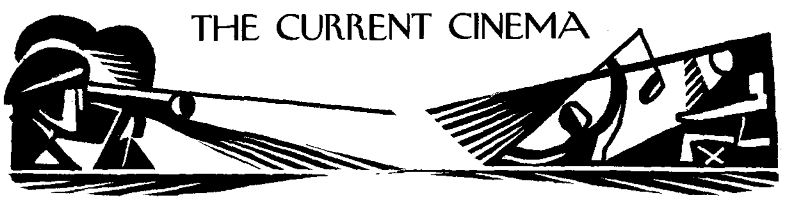


THE CURRENT CINEMA

THE SINS OF THE FATHERS

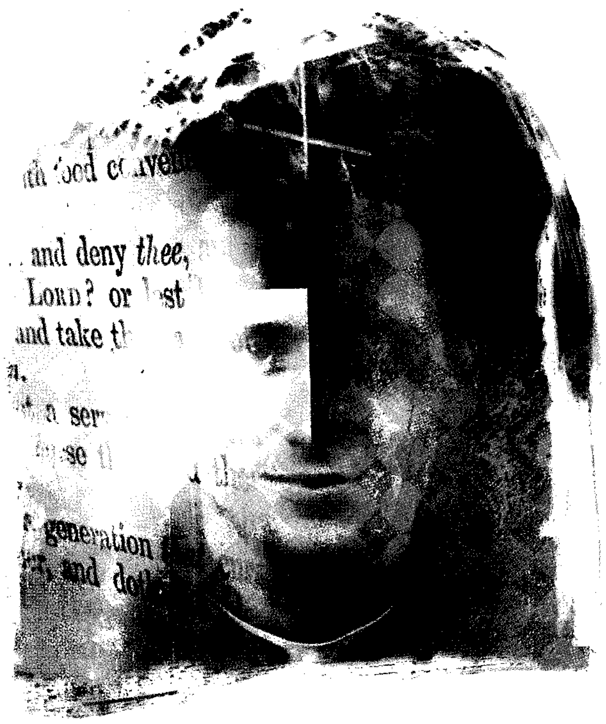
An argumentative drama about God and man in Liverpool.

BY ANTHONY LANE

“PRIEST” is destined, and designed, to get people hot under the collar. Any kind of collar, regular as well as dog. The movie lashes out with such wounded scorn that no one in the audience can hope to escape untouched. The devout will be incensed; the faithless will be furious; newspaper columnists will feel an itching at their fingertips; many gay-rights advocates will be driven round the bend; and those who were molested as children will find their memories starting to flood. Anyone not covered by the above will need a stiff drink.

The movie, directed by Antonia Bird, is set in Liverpool, which remains one of the strongholds of English Catholicism, not least because it has been fortified by a continuing influx of Irish Catholics. Whether you could call the city a rock of the true faith is another matter; communities in England have a habit of soldiering on and protecting their own long after the beliefs that fired and molded them have fallen away. What you end up with looks solid but rings hollow, and this is the sorry situation that greets young Father Greg Pilkington (Linus Roache) when he arrives in Liverpool, aflame with zeal. He is unyielding in his views, and declaims them to a suspicious congregation. As a priest, he says, he must be concerned with the soiling and cleansing of the particular soul, not with the scapegoat of “that mythical beast called society.”

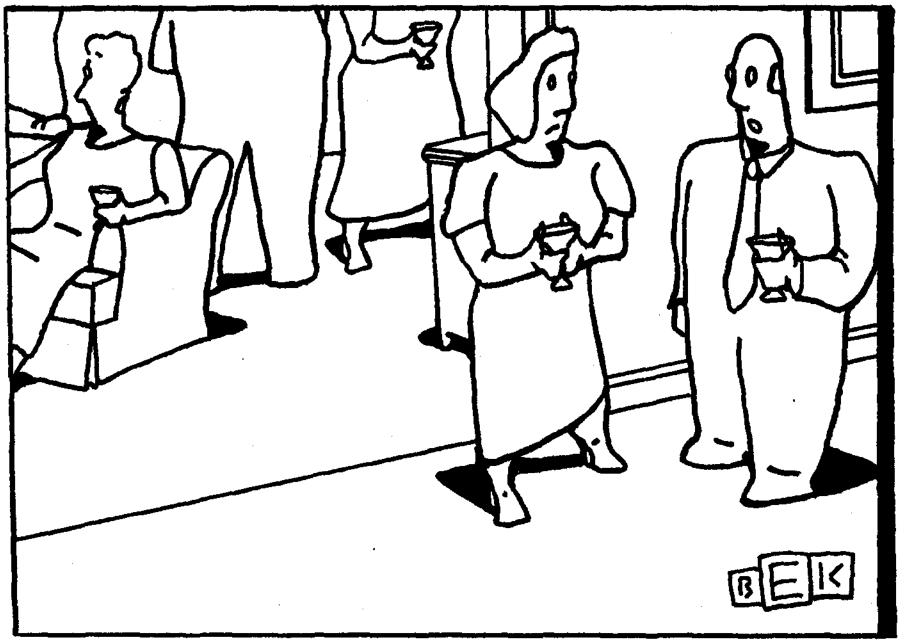
Even as he speaks, the movie is preparing to set the poor guy up. You just know he's going to get butted by the scapegoat. Antonia Bird's camera is all too keen to inspect the social conditions that have failed to move Father Greg—in the tower blocks, for instance, where he tries to spread the word, only to have doors slammed in his face. Greg's stiff-backed reserve contrasts unfavorably with the shaggy manner of his fellow-priest Father Matthew (Tom Wilkinson). The two share a house: Greg is seen eating alone and reading the London *Times;* Matthew takes the more liberal *Guardian*, bawls his way through karaoke night with the locals, and sleeps with the housekeeper.



Reconciled to his nature: Linus Roache as Father Greg, the new priest in town.

DAVE MCKEAN

Greg doesn't sleep with anyone, not at first. But you can tell what's coming,



"Right now, I'm between naps."

• •

and with whom. One evening, he hangs up his ecclesiastical garb and reaches to the back of the closet for another uniform—a leather jacket. Soon he is cruising downtown on his bicycle, hitting a gay bar, picking up a man named Graham, and having breathy sex under soft light. Well, don't be so shocked. What did you expect? If the left-winger happily screws the housekeeper, it follows that the doctrinal conservative, the emotional miser, must be a repressed homosexual. The film is so good at snaring you in its convictions that you don't think twice about the logic of this—you hardly think once. In fact, it isn't logic at all; it's merely prejudice, stitching its sly patterns. How much more interesting if Father Matthew had been the one with the guilty secret, with a little closed door at the back of his open mind, and if Greg had fallen in love with the housekeeper, or else—and this would have been the sharpest shock of all—if he really had been celibate.

You might think that "Priest" is already brimming over with issues, but there's more: on top of urban decay and gay clergy we get child abuse. (Don't expect a repeat of "The Boys of St. Vincent," though; these priests aren't *that* bad.) A young girl comes for confession and tells Father Greg that she is being raped regularly, and secretly, by her father. Our hero is thus imprisoned in the oldest and clammiest of priestly dilemmas, the one that got Montgomery Clift in such a pickle in "I Confess": How can you see justice done while preserving the sanctity and confidentiality of the confessional? In this case, things aren't exactly helped when the tampering parent himself (William Pugh) turns up to menace Greg. "Keep your nose out of my business," he says, before elaborating on his obsession: "Incest is human. It's the most natural thing in the world. It's the one thing we'd all like to do." Oh, great, precisely what we need: not just a molester but a molestation *expert*, an incest wonk. Pugh is wonderfully cast: his moon-round face might once have been kindly, you suspect, and that's why it now looks so piggish with lust. The movie needed only to glance at the man in order to convey the bafflement and the brutality that drive such furtive deeds; but it has to give him a cause, and a big speech.

The writer of "Priest" is Jimmy McGovern, who comes to movies fresh from a lively stretch in British television: he wrote "Cracker," a series about a police psychologist, and a secondary-school drama called "Hearts and Minds." If they were more talked about than anything else on TV, that's because, short of buying a pair of earmuffs, you couldn't escape the sensation of being talked *at*. McGovern raises hectoring to the level of an art, though not a fine art; the result sounds like Brecht with good jokes, which makes a change from Brecht. Antonia Bird stuffs all the McGovern themes into less than two hours and wads them tight: the characters fight the system—the Catholic Church, the dysfunctional family—with muscles so clenched and quivering that you start to wonder what the system did to deserve all this. The sole purpose of its existence, apparently, is to hang there like a punching bag and get pummelled. McGovern certainly doesn't provide any real characters to argue the case for the system: once Greg's homosexuality becomes public knowledge, his clerical opponents include a scowling throwback who condemns him over the dinner table in Latin and a bishop who hisses, "The best way for you to serve God is to piss off out of my diocese."

Father Matthew will have none of it. "Bugger the bishop," he says to Greg, adding, "Don't take that literally." This keeps on happening: just when the movie is straining too hard and testing your patience, it wins you back with a nice low gag. Tom Wilkinson is exactly right for these moments; large and loping, he turns Matthew's textbook charity back into something recognizably human. McGovern and Bird want to make him stand for something, but he prefers to slob around, doing good in the way that other people get drunk. Wilkinson makes a great foil for Linus Roache, flesh to his bone; and you believe in this growing friendship, because the physical (and wholly unsexual) comedy of it suggests an ease and a tolerance lacking in the rest of the movie. Angular and brittle with worry, Roache's Greg is a hybrid of Stan Laurel and Cardinal Newman, and he needs a Hardy around—someone to annoy and trust in. He can tell Matthew, as he can tell nobody else, how useless it is to try to put things right with a little time and reflection. "I'm reconciled to my nature! Cue the uplifting music," he says. Fair enough, but there's one problem: time and again, the movie literally does cue the uplifting music, just one of the ways in which it keeps rigging the evidence. It does this so blatantly and forcefully that, against your better judgment, you feel yourself being swayed. (That may be one definition of a successful picture.) Greg attends a wake, and finds the smashed mourners singing "Great Balls of Fire" and collapsing into a weepy stupor. Why, I wondered, should we buy this gleaming portrait of working-class solidarity but not Greg's protestations of faith?

What you make of "Priest" will be decided by what you think of the prayer scene. This comes when Father Greg, aghast at his moral impotence in the case of the young girl, kneels by his bed and confronts the crucifix on the wall. "Do something—don't just hang there, you smug, idle bastard," he rants. I always thought that George Herbert had more or less covered the subject when he called prayer "the soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage," "exalted manna, gladness of the best," and a dozen other things, but I now realize that he left out "shouting match" and "student agitprop." Greg warms to his theme, reading his Saviour's mind without a qualm: "You wouldn't give a damn about the Church, with its rules and regulations"—and so on, with the camera jockeying up and down to get the most acute angle on his exploding soul. Leaving aside the fact that some of those rules were laid down at the Last Supper, you can't help finding it odd that the mild-mannered Greg should now be addressing Christ in the style of a Liverpool soccer fan haranguing the referee. But this, I guess, is how "Priest" makes its mark: McGovern and Bird are prepared to sacrifice a little character in the interests of the plot, which must, at all costs, surge onward and knock the breath out of the audience. Their plan works, of course, and Greg's prayers appear to be answered: you leave the theatre winded and floundering, take time out, and then start to argue about what it all meant.

It doesn't mean much, apart from the obvious warning to keep away from institutions. That's down-to-earth advice, and you can hardly blame "Priest" for being a worldly film. Modern cinema is, let's face it, the most thoroughly secular medium in history—although anyone who argues that the universe is entirely random or entirely malign has yet to be introduced to the work of Audrey Hepburn. What bugged me about "Priest" was that it's a secular movie pretending to be a religious movie; it presumes to dramatize a range of religious emotions while refusing to take seriously, or even to notice, the beliefs that sponsored them. (This stubbornness, rather than any histrionic jeering at the Redeemer, pushes the work close to blasphemy, but, even so, I wouldn't want Rome to call down some thunderous Liverpudlian *fatwa* on the distributors.) McGovern seems to think that he's broken the code of spiritual need, that he's cracked this old-fashioned game; he ponders his characters psychologically, and often does so with dexterity and wit, but it seems never to have crossed his mind that the impulse toward faith may begin where psychology leaves off, and that the ensuing struggles may unfold far beyond its reach.

"Priest" feels less like a movie than like really good television; and, indeed, it was originally written to be a four-part series for the BBC. Its punches are thrown with passion but no style: you long for more grace notes, for breathing space, for the depth of detail that could help you to inhabit the priestly world. Whatever Greg says, a few *more* rules and regulations would have come in handy. Even in a film like "True Confessions," whose careful blankness was no match for the intensity of "Priest," the camera studied De Niro going about his ritual business as if it were genuinely curious about him, about the motors of his devotion; whereas Antonia Bird just follows the path laid down by the screenplay, which starts with the assumption that we understand Father Greg only too well and that all we need to do is track his folly to its close. But it's one hell of a close: an all-out wrencher, the kind that leaves the popcorn actually embedded in your palms. It happens during a celebration of Mass; even the director must have been overwhelmed, since she doesn't give us a simple establishing shot to clarify what's going on, which is that nobody is lining up to receive the Host from Father Greg. Finally, one person finds the courage to act, and thus the two central victims of the film are reconciled. Only afterward, as you walk away, do you realize what a weird form the reconciliation has taken: a *hug*. What ever happened to kneeling? ♦

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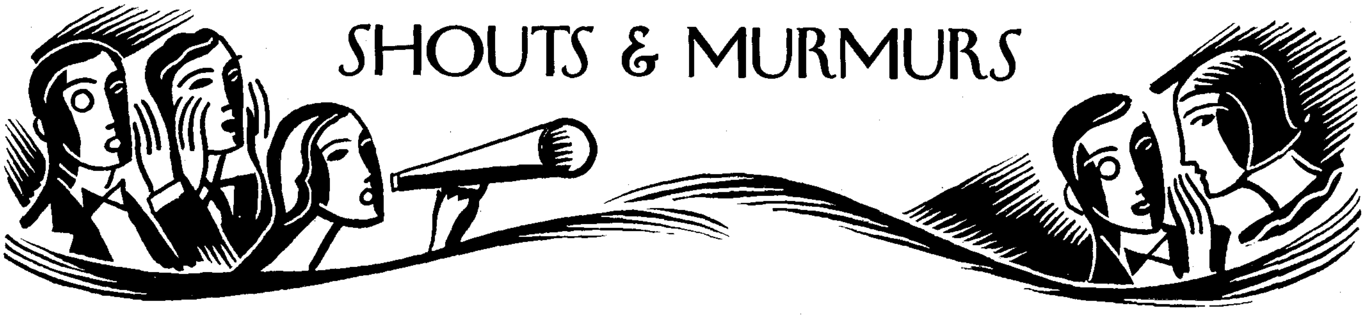
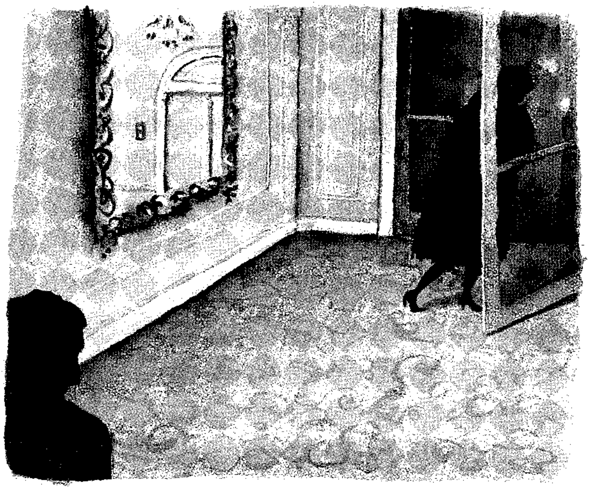


SHOUTS & MURMURS

CALL GUY

BY ALEC WILKINSON



ABIRA ALI

Here is a cautionary tale about loneliness and modern appliances. The other night, my wife and I were having dinner at the apartment of friends who have a baby. The child was asleep. Beside the table we were sitting at, our friends had one of those monitors that allow parents to hear their child if he wakes. I have no idea when people began using these devices, but I think that by now everyone is familiar enough with them to know that they are just as likely to broadcast a gypsy-cab driver's radio call as a child crying. Once, late at night, over the monitor that my wife and I have for our son, I heard a woman sobbing and a man's voice saying, "If you don't quit drinking, I don't think there's much hope for our marriage."

After dinner, we were talking—there were five of us—and a woman's voice came over the monitor. "Well, what time, then?" she said, peevishly. We could hear a man's deep voice at the other end of the line, but we couldn't hear what he was saying—when he talked we mostly heard static. What we gathered was that he was in a car in New Jersey, heading toward the Lincoln Tunnel.

"Where am I supposed to meet you?" she asked.

". . ."

"Port Authority!"

". . ."

"You want me to wait in the cold in a doorway?"

". . ."

"I can't believe this. All right. Wait a minute. All right. South side of Forty-second Street, between Eighth and Ninth Avenues, halfway down the block. How am I going to recognize your car?"

". . ."

"Jesus Christ. I asked for a gentleman, and they sent me you."

I think he offered to pick her up at her building, because she said, "No, I don't want anyone seeing us."

About then, it dawned on us that the woman had called an escort service, and that this was the date they were sending. He must have asked how he would recognize her. "I look like Lady Godiva," she said. "With brown hair."

". . ."

"All I can say is, you better not keep me waiting."

". . ."

"And you *better* be romantic." Then she hung up.

It can have been only a few seconds before we heard her again. She called a friend, a woman, I'm guessing—we couldn't hear that voice either—who seemed to believe that standing on Forty-second Street late at night to meet a prostitute was an insufficiently considered idea. "Listen, honey," the woman said, "I'm looking for love. I'm old enough. I'm allowed."

I don't remember what she said next. What I remember instead is one of our friends' saying—and I've changed the details—"That's the woman in 8-C! The paralegal with the cocker spaniel! I knew I recognized that voice!"

"I'm dressed like a cheap hooker," the woman said, and then she said that it was time for her to leave.

Our friends' apartment is on the fourth floor. I ran down the stairs. The building has a self-service elevator, which was in the lobby when I arrived. Nothing happened for what seemed so long that I was about to walk back upstairs. Then the elevator rose. I heard it pause and descend. The lobby is very small. When the elevator doors opened, she walked toward me. She was perhaps fifty. Her face was long and thin and a little tense. She had on a fur coat held tightly closed with one hand at her neck, and she had thin legs and was wearing black stockings and heels. The color in her cheeks and around her eyes had required some time before a mirror. I thought it would be funny to say "Going to Forty-second Street?" and then realized that it wouldn't be. She walked out the door and called a taxi and got in and rode away.

I watched the tail-lights disappear and felt the strange, thrilling (and totally one-sided) sense of intimacy around me dissolve. I imagined the woman stepping out of the cab, wrapping her fur coat more tightly around her, then climbing two steps, turning toward the street, and waiting in the doorway for a car to pull to the curb. I did this a number of times. Each time her face became more and more difficult to recall, until finally I couldn't picture it anymore, and then I went back upstairs to the party. ♦

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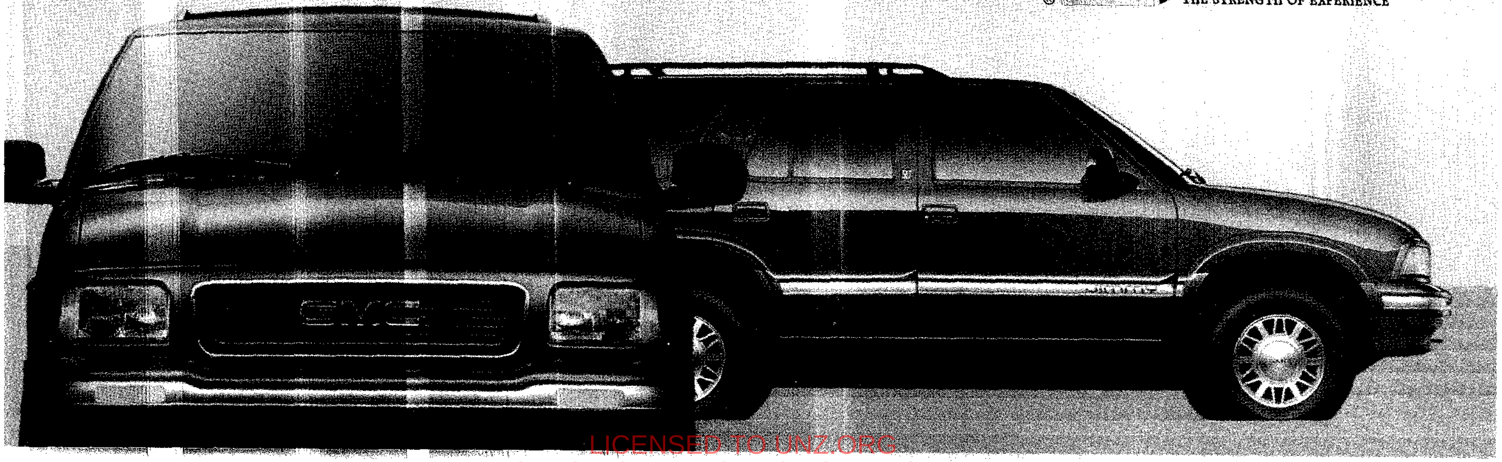

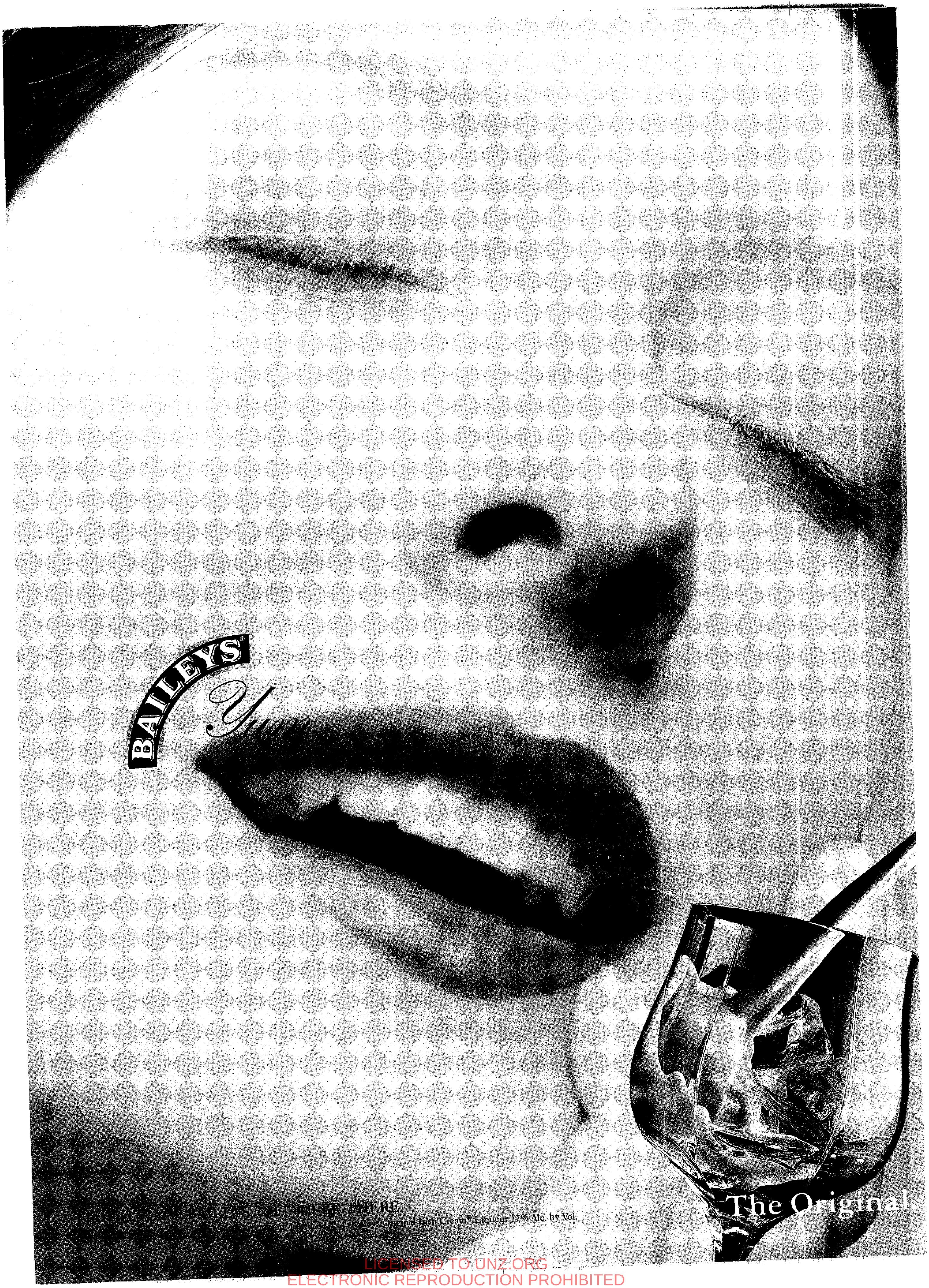
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